DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 301 EA 029 104

AUTHOR	Doherty, Kathryn; Abernathy, Sarah
TITLE	Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders.
INSTITUTION	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-05-00
NOTE	90p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN; Internet: www.ed.gov.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; Accountability; *Change Strategies; Educational Environment; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *School Districts; *State Action; *Teacher Expectations of Students
IDENTIFIERS	*Capacity Building

ABSTRACT

This guide describes various strategies that states and districts are pursuing to help turn around low-performing schools and raise expectations for all students. Strategies include helping schools gain control of the learning environment, concentrating resources and efforts on providing students with challenging curricula and high-quality instruction, providing services to ensure school readiness, creating a professional development program aligned with curricular content and focused on instructional improvement, and helping schools implement comprehensive school reform programs. It is also important to build underachieving schools' organizational capacity by ensuring strong school leadership, promoting policies that encourage teacher commitment to reform, using resources strategically, helping schools use performance data to drive improvement, involving the community, and providing incentives for change and support for innovation. Initiatives in New York State, Chicago, and San Francisco provide successful examples. President Clinton has also suggested initiatives to improve student achievement, including educational opportunity zones, reduced class size, the America Reads Challenge, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and a school construction initiative to modernize buildings and alleviate overcrowding. (Includes a list of government documents and 800 numbers, 22 endnotes, a bibliography of 54 references, and an executive summary.) (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 419 301

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

A Guide for State and Local Leaders

EA029104

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

U.S. Department of Education

Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education

Marshall S. Smith
Acting U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education

Terry K. Peterson
Counselor to the Secretary

For additional copies of this document, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Department's website at <www.ed.gov>.

TURNING AROUND LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

A Guide for State and Local Leaders

"I challenge every school district to adopt high standards, to abolish social promotion, to move aggressively to help all students make the grade through tutoring and summer schools, and to hold schools accountable for results, giving them the tools and the leadership and the parental involvement to do the job."

—President Clinton, October 28, 1997

"We cannot and must not tolerate failing schools. We need to stop making excuses and get on with the business of fixing our schools. We have the unique opportunity to do what is best for our children. This should be our great patriotic cause—our national mission: Giving all of our children a world-class education by putting standards of excellence into action."

—Secretary of Education Richard Riley, February 18, 1997

May 1998

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE SECRETARY

May 1998

Dear state or local leader:

I am pleased to respond to the President's directive with a guide for state and local policymakers confronting the challenge of chronically low-performing schools. This guide speaks to leaders who want to turn around low-performing schools by making fundamental changes that create a safe, orderly environment that focuses on high standards of teaching and learning for all students.

There is little doubt that some of our schools are failing to provide the kind of educational experience we want for our children. In too many schools, expectations of students are low, teachers and parents are frustrated, and academic performance is poor. Particularly in our nation's highest-poverty urban schools, where two-thirds of the students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement, the need for change is urgent.

There is no one place to lay the blame for low-performing schools. Many problems — poverty, limited resources, family stress, poor teacher training, unsafe learning environments, and other factors — contribute to frustration on the part of teachers, disillusionment on the part of communities, and discouragingly low levels of student achievement. While these problems are serious and highlight the complexity of the challenges facing schools, they cannot thwart our efforts to improve our schools.

We know that in countless communities, low-performing schools can and are being turned around. Our task is to make *every* public school a quality environment that focuses on teaching and learning. If we do not make that effort, we are sending a devastating message to children about our commitment to their well-being and to the nation's future.

This guide highlights how state, district, and community leaders can help schools focus on high standards of teaching and learning, build commitment for fundamental improvements in low-performing schools, and implement strategies to raise student achievement. The guide also examines approaches that states and districts are using to intervene in persistently low-performing schools. From Kentucky to Texas and Boston to San Francisco, public leaders are raising their expectations for students and schools, supporting system-wide reforms that work, and demanding school and student accountability for performance. Across the nation, there are examples of schools that, with a bold set of strategies, are changing what happens between teachers and students in the classroom, focusing on learning, and improving student achievement. Turning around low-performing schools is hard work, but it is the responsibility of each and every community in America.

600 INDEPENDENCE AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202-0100

Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the Nation.

Our society is only as strong as the education of our people. Let us raise our expectations of our schools. Let us dedicate ourselves to ensuring that all schools provide children with the skills they need to be successful and productive citizens. Let us work together to turn around low-performing schools.

Attached is a copy of the Executive Summary of "Turning Around Low-Performing Schools." For a copy of the full guide, please call the Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Yours sincerely,

Dick Riley

Richard W. Riley

Contents

Presidential Directive

Executive Summary

Introduction: An Urgent Need for Action 1

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance 5
Holding Schools Accountable
Identifying Low-Performing Schools

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement 11
Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite
Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction
Starting Early for School Readiness
Preparing for Classroom Change: Professional Development
Implementing Comprehensive Reform Programs

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change 25
Building Leadership, Trust, and Ownership
Mobilizing Resources to Support School Improvement
Using Performance Data to Drive Continuous Improvement
Working in Partnership with Parents and Community
Stimulating Innovation and Change

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools 43
Collaborative Efforts to Redesign Low-Performing Schools
School Reconstitution: A Strategy of Last Resort
Intervention Strategies: Lessons and Considerations

Conclusion 53

Checklist for Improvement 55
Suggestions for State and Local Leaders
Suggestions for School Leaders
Suggestions for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

U.S. Department of Education Inventory of Support for Turning Around Schools . . . 61
Proposed Initiatives
Programs to Improve Low-Performing Schools
Other Programs That Can Help Support Reform Efforts

Presidential Directive

Since taking office in 1993, my Administration has pursued a comprehensive effort to strengthen public schools. We have worked to raise academic standards, promote accountability, and provide greater competition and choice within the public schools, including support for a dramatic increase in charter schools. Moreover, we have worked to make the investments necessary to improve teaching and learning in classrooms across America, through efforts to keep our schools safe and free of drugs; to provide students who need it extra help to master the basics; to increase parental and community involvement; to recruit, prepare, and provide continuing training to teachers and reward excellence in teaching; and to make sure every school has access to and can effectively use 21st century technology.

This strategy is starting to produce results. We know that all students can learn to high standards, and that every school can succeed if it has clear instructional goals and high expectations for all of its students; creates a safe, disciplined and orderly environment for learning; helps parents be involved in their children's education; and uses proven instructional practices. All schools must be given the resources, tools, and flexibility to help every student reach high standards.

Yet, no school improvement strategy can succeed without real accountability for results, as measured by student achievement. Excellent schools and schools that show significant improvement must be recognized and rewarded. At the same time, schools that demonstrate persistently poor academic performance -- schools that fail to make adequate progress in educating all students to high standards -- must be held accountable. No American child deserves to get a second-class education. Instead, State and local education officials must step in and redesign failing schools, or close them down and reopen them with new, more effective leadership and staff.

A growing number of cities and States have begun to take these steps. Cities such as Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New York, and States such as Maryland and Kentucky identify low-performing schools and take steps to intervene if these schools fail to make progress. These steps often include the implementation of school improvement plans – providing after-school academic help to students, strengthening training and assistance for school staff, creating smaller and more personal settings, such as schools-within-schools – and, where necessary, reconstitution of the school and replacement of the school principal and other staff.

We must encourage and help more cities and States to take up the challenge of turning around low-performing schools and helping the students they serve get back on the path to achievement. We can do this by making widely available information on what works and what doesn't, and by ensuring that Department of Education resources are most productively used for these purposes.

In order to accomplish this, I am directing the Department of Education to take the following actions:

1. **Produce and Widely Disseminate Guidelines on Effective Approaches to Turning Around Low-Performing Schools.** There is much of value to be shared from the experiences of cities and States that already have successfully intervened in low-performing schools; from research and development on effective school improvement practices; and from business experience in managing high-performance organizations and in turning around low-performing companies. We know of several promising models of reform, ranging from the New American Schools designs to the Success for All program. These lessons must be summarized in clear and useable forms, and made widely available to educators, parents, State and local policy makers, business leaders, and others working to improve public education.

2. **Help Cities and States Use Existing Department of Education Resources to Turn Around Low-Performing Schools.** First, Department of Education programs should help and encourage more cities and States to develop and implement sound, comprehensive approaches to turn around low-performing schools and help students in them get a better education. The Department should develop a plan to provide technical assistance to cities and States seeking to turn around failing schools. In addition, the Department should inform cities and States of how they can use funds from existing Department programs to support their objectives. Many programs, such as Title I, Goals 2000, the Public Charter Schools Program, and the 21st Century Schools Program, are well suited for intervening in failing schools, because they can be used to provide extra help to students during and after the school day; to support high quality professional development for teachers; and to plan and implement effective school reforms. The Department should ensure that local school districts can easily and effectively access Federal funds from such programs and use them in an integrated fashion to support comprehensive efforts to improve low-performing schools. Where there are statutory barriers to accomplishing this purpose, such barriers should be identified so we can work with the Congress to change them.

Together, these initiatives can help local school districts turn failing schools into successful schools by improving teacher training, strengthening instructional practices, overhauling school management, and implementing schoolwide reforms. They can provide students who need it with extra help, during and after school hours. And they can provide students with additional choices within the public schools.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON
October 28, 1997

Executive Summary

As we approach the 21st century, American public education is rising to meet a new challenge — high expectations and achievement for *all* students in *every* school. States and school districts are raising academic standards and making efforts to align curriculum, assessments, teacher training, and instruction with these challenging standards. The U.S. Department of Education is supporting these efforts with programs and resources to help improve teaching and learning in schools across the nation.

Expecting more from schools and students demands that state and district leaders face the important task of improving low-performing schools. In some of our schools, student achievement is dismal. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that the academic performance of students in our nation's highest-poverty schools is often several grade levels behind that of students in low-poverty schools. In low-performing schools, teachers sometimes have low expectations of students and feel that they can do little to improve student performance. Often the environment is not conducive to learning — teachers are burnt out, school safety is a problem, and students and the community are disengaged. Many low-performing schools are located in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent. Limited financial, human, and program resources can leave these schools without the support they need to deliver high-quality instruction.

Turning around low-performing schools is not easy. It involves making strategic decisions about instructional practices and focusing all school staff on aligning every aspect of school operations, from professional development to parent and community involvement, in order to support and sustain efforts to improve student achievement.

Low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make these kinds of changes on their own. While much of what it takes to turn around a low-performing school can occur only within the school itself and with the cooperation and commitment of school staff, states and school districts must provide the critical impetus and support for the process of change.

Fixing Low-Performing Schools: Pathways to Progress

✔Set high expectations for students.
✔Hold schools accountable for performance.
✔Provide a safe learning environment.
✔Create leaders at school and district levels.
✔Let leaders lead.
✔Recruit and retain the best teachers.
✔Train teachers in instruction and curriculum.
✔Support students with extra help and time.
✔Involve the community in schooling.
✔Create smaller schools.
✔Close or reconstitute bad schools.

-Adapted from *Education Week*, January 8, 1998

By setting high academic standards, holding all schools accountable for performance, and identifying schools that do not meet those standards, states and districts are taking important steps to raise expectations for all students. For schools that do not meet expectations, states and districts can do much to provide the support necessary to help them focus on improving teaching and learning. In schools where student achievement remains persistently low, many states and districts are actively intervening with resources and technical assistance to further the school improvement process. This guide describes some of the strategies that states and districts are pursuing to help turn around low-performing schools. It also suggests concrete actions that state, district, and school leaders, as well as parents and community members, can take. The guide concludes with an inventory of federal resources that can support efforts to turn around low-performing schools.

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance

Across the nation, states and districts are raising the stakes by establishing procedures and standards to define expectations for students, identify poor performance, and hold schools accountable for student achievement. Texas, for example, annually collects achievement data from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills on its more than 3.7 million students. The state uses these data to measure not only progress at the school level but academic performance by racial/ethnic and income categories. For a school to be rated "acceptable" in Texas, at least 40 percent of all students in each racial and economic category must pass each section of the assessment. In addition, schools must maintain an attendance rate of at least 94 percent and a dropout rate of no more than 6 percent. The data on each school are made available to the public, and performance standards increase over time. In Texas, and in many other states and districts across the nation, schools that do not meet standards of performance are subject to sanctions or state and local intervention.

States and districts also are sending strong signals to students about their own accountability for academic performance. Chicago, for example, has committed to eliminating social promotion — the automatic passing of students from grade to grade regardless of whether they have mastered necessary skills. Districtwide, students who perform below minimum standards at key grades are required to participate in a seven-week summer school program.

Holding schools and students more accountable for performance is forcing states and districts to face the issue of low-performing schools head-on. Once these schools have been identified, how can states and districts help them do what it takes to improve student achievement?

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement

The bottom line is for low-performing schools to make changes that will allow them to deliver high-quality curriculum and instruction so that all children reach challenging academic standards. This may seem straightforward, but it is not easy — for any school. Effective schools are places where there is a coherent program for teaching and learning and where all key elements in the school are aligned with that focus. In the case of low-performing schools, states and districts can provide assistance by:

- **Helping schools gain control of the learning environment.** This is a prerequisite to focusing on learning. Schools cannot effectively implement instructional changes if they do not first address student discipline, safety, and high absenteeism. Districts can help school leaders by instituting a "zero tolerance" policy for violence and drugs and by consistently and fairly enforcing such policies. School uniforms and effective classroom management strategies also can help create an environment conducive to learning. Gaining control of the school environment means more than just implementing get-tough discipline policies; it also involves showing respect for students and giving them responsibilities, as members of the school community, for maintaining a safe environment for learning.

- **Concentrating resources and efforts on providing students with challenging curriculum and high-quality instruction.** If students are to be held accountable for reaching high standards of performance, then they must be offered the kinds of curriculum and instruction that will help them meet that challenge. Districts must demand that all schools offer challenging coursework to all students. To help ensure that every student reaches high standards, states and districts can use resources to increase instructional time, extend the school day or the school year, and offer after-school assistance to students who need it.

- **Providing services so that young children come to school ready to learn.** A child's early environment is critical to intellectual development and school success. In recognition of this fact, states and school districts can help ensure that more children benefit from early childhood services. In addition to providing pre-kindergarten for children, many local education agencies are partnering with community organizations to implement family literacy programs, such as Even Start, that support early childhood education, school readiness, and parent involvement in learning activities.

- **Creating a professional development program aligned with the content of curriculum and focused on improving instruction.** Professional development is an often neglected element of the academic program in low-performing schools. To be effective, professional development activities must center on the classroom. Community School District #2 in New York City, for example, concentrates its professional development resources and time on engaging teachers in learning about the materials they teach and skills they need to improve classroom instruction. The district works to identify teachers that need assistance and helps to counsel teachers out of the profession if they do not improve.

- **Helping schools implement comprehensive school reform programs.** Creating coherent educational programs in low-performing schools usually requires changes in all aspects of a school, including its curriculum and academic standards, school governance, community-school relationships, staff development, technology, parent involvement, and services to meet children's needs. For this reason, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act emphasizes the need for schoolwide programs in high-poverty, low-performing schools. There are a number of research-based models and designs available to help schools address these multiple aspects of school effectiveness, and many provide technical assistance to help schools implement the designs. Districts such as San Antonio, Memphis, and Cincinnati are implementing a number of these models in a large proportion of their schools.

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change

Research tells us that high-performing schools align curriculum, classroom practices, and professional development with high academic standards for all students. These schools also build a sense of teamwork among staff, work in partnership with parents and the community, and use performance data to inform choices and create a cycle of continuous improvement.

District support for these practices is key for building the capacity of schools to improve student achievement. Yet, low-performing schools are sometimes embedded in troubled school systems that cannot support the school improvement process. Individual school efforts can be thwarted by districts that fail to provide leadership and that lack the focus and long-term commitment necessary for turning around low-performing schools.

Therefore, part of the process of building the capacity of low-performing schools involves setting priorities on the district level, such as:

- **Ensuring strong leadership at the school.** Districts must recruit principals who will serve as instructional leaders.

- **Promoting policies that encourage teacher commitment to reform.** Districts should hire teachers enthusiastic about change and willing to work in low-performing schools. Districts also can be flexible, allowing teachers the chance to leave a school if they do not want to participate in the school reform process. Teacher and staff commitment to improving schools can be fostered by efforts to create smaller schools, which generally have better communication and collaboration among staff — two ingredients that are essential for creating a shared purpose and collective responsibility for school improvement.

- **Using resources strategically.** Schools must make tough choices about the ways they allocate their resources if they are to focus on improving teaching and learning. Low-performing schools and school districts often have multiple competing priorities. While districts and schools may implement separate programs intended to address specific needs, the programs can be unfocused, disjointed, or work at cross-purposes. Pieced together, these multiple efforts often do not add up to a coherent whole. Districts must help schools coordinate and concentrate their resources on classroom instruction.

Districts also can do much to streamline their administrative operations and help redirect resources into the classroom. For example, part of Philadelphia's education reform plan "Children Achieving" involves implementing cost-cutting administrative reforms. Over the past two years, Philadelphia has been able to save more than $29 million. To the extent that such resources can be targeted toward low-performing schools that work to develop coherent school improvement plans, streamlining district budgets can boost low-performing schools and help raise public and community confidence in local public school systems.

- Helping schools use performance data to drive improvement. Using data is important for identifying patterns of failure, diagnosing problems, and matching concrete solutions to educational needs. States such as Maryland and districts such as Minneapolis are disaggregating test scores to help identify causes for low performance, develop appropriate improvement strategies, and monitor progress as a strategy for continuous improvement.

- Working in partnership with the community. Schools cannot do their jobs alone. Low-performing schools, in particular, need the assistance of community stakeholders to raise student performance. Parent involvement is essential. Local businesses, colleges, and universities are invaluable sources of support. Teacher unions can be cooperative allies in the process of change if they are invited to work in partnership to improve low-performing schools.

- Providing incentives for change and support for innovation. Districts can help support school-level change by following the lessons of high-performance organizations. In many states, local educators, parents, community members, and school board members can create public charter schools that operate under performance contracts that provide greater autonomy along with accountability for results. Public school choice and open enrollment policies also can provide incentives for school improvement. Boston, for instance, allows parents to choose from an array of neighborhood schools, magnet schools, and public charter schools. Districts also can provide incentives for school improvement by rewarding success. Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Benchmark Goals program, for example, gives cash awards to teachers whose students meet a range of goals that reflect improvements over previous performance.

Intervening in Chronically Low-Performing Schools

Because low-performing schools often have little capacity to make major reforms demanded by accountability policies, many states and districts are providing systemwide support for school improvement. Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in chronically low-performing schools — from helping "redesign" schools to, as a last resort, reconstituting failing schools.

In many cases, intervention has been a collaborative experience. For example, New York State has developed a process to help redesign low-performing schools. Teams of teachers, board of education members, union representatives, parents, and curriculum experts led by district superintendents conduct four-day visits to low-performing schools to examine all aspects of school operations. Based on the recommendations of review teams, schools and districts develop corrective action plans. In New York City, the process includes assigning low-performing schools to the "Chancellor's District." A school assigned to the special district receives extra resources and technical assistance until the district determines that the school has the capacity and commitment to support its redesign plan.

Districts such as Chicago and San Francisco have employed reconstitution measures in attempting to turn around chronically low-performing schools. While the strategy encompasses a number of practices, it generally represents the extreme along a continuum of intervention strategies. In its basic form, reconstitution involves closing a school and reopening it with new school leaders and usually with new teachers and staff. Reconstitution policies are controversial and there is no conclusive data about whether reconstitution is an effective strategy for school improvement. Some believe that the threat of reconstitution has been an important force for leveraging change in chronically low-performing schools. Opponents believe reconstitution policies unfairly place the blame for poor student achievement on teachers and damage fledgling school communities.

Regardless of the individual policy, state and district intervention in low-performing schools cannot succeed without the cooperation and commitment of those who actually work in the school. Turning around low-performing schools is difficult work. It requires high expectations, a focus on learning, a commitment to students, strong leadership, trust among school staff, and collective responsibility for student achievement. States and districts cannot dictate that schools have these characteristics, but they do have a critical leadership role in setting the context for change and raising the capacity of schools to acquire these attributes.

U.S. Department of Education Support

President Clinton and the U.S. Department of Education are committed to providing the support needed to help turn around low-performing schools. For example, beginning in July 1998, the Department will provide $145 million for states to award to districts and schools working to implement high-quality, research-based comprehensive school reform programs. Along with **Title I** of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and **Goals 2000**, this **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program** will present an opportunity for districts to target their lowest-performing schools for schoolwide improvement models.

President Clinton has also proposed several initiatives to help increase student achievement, particularly in high-poverty schools, including:

- **Educational Opportunity Zones** to help high-poverty urban and rural districts implement some of the kinds of policies highlighted in this guide that support school accountability and improvements in student performance;
- **Reducing class size** to a national average of 18 students per class in the early grades, a policy that research shows would especially benefit students in high-poverty schools;
- **America Reads Challenge**, an initiative that encourages school and community partnerships to provide high-quality reading instruction through linking in-school and out-of-school reading programs. The goal is to ensure that all children learn to read well and independently by the end of third grade;
- **21st Century Community Learning Centers** to fund school-community partnerships to build or expand after-school, extended learning programs for school-age children; and
- **School Construction Initiative** to help modernize school buildings through interest-free bonds to support high-quality teaching and learning environments and to alleviate classroom overcrowding.

As we face a new century, it is time for America to renew its commitment to future generations. There is a role for each and every member of the school community in raising our expectations for all students, providing a safe learning environment, aligning educational resources and instruction with high academic standards, and choosing long-term improvement strategies. This guide provides examples of promising state, district, and school practices for helping children to learn, and suggests concrete steps that state and local policy makers, school leaders, parents, and community stakeholders can take to fix low-performing schools. Through these efforts, we can work together to make all schools places where students strive toward high levels of learning and achievement.

Introduction: An Urgent Need for Action

Today, Americans demand more from schools and expect more from students than ever before. During this century, our nation pledged to increase access to education for all children. As we approach a new century, American public education must rise to a new challenge — helping all children in every school reach high standards of learning.

States and school districts across the nation are carrying out reforms to realize this commitment to a high-quality education for all children. Many are setting challenging content and student performance standards, aligning teacher development, curriculum, instruction, and assessments with these standards and holding schools accountable for performance.

Yet some of our schools are failing on every standard that defines the education we would wish for our children. A recent report on the nation's school systems reveals that in high-poverty urban schools, for instance, a full *two-thirds* of the students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement.[1] Such low-performing schools face a number of common challenges. For example:

- *Many low-performing schools are located in impoverished communities where family distress, crime, and violence are prevalent. These and other circumstances make it hard for children to come to school prepared to learn.* Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show large gaps in student performance between high- and low-poverty schools. In 1996, the average score in reading for nine-year-olds in high-poverty schools lagged 37 points behind that of students in more affluent schools; the average score in math showed a 21-point difference.[2] Because each 10-point difference is approximately equal to one grade level, these results mean that students in high-poverty schools may be performing at levels up to four years behind their peers in low-poverty schools.

- *State and district policies often provide limited financial, human, and programmatic resources to schools that do not have the capacity to support high-quality teaching and learning.* Many low-performing schools have inadequate facilities, books, and supplies; overcrowded classrooms; poorly trained teachers; limited access to technology; and thinly stretched resources to meet student needs. Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely than their counterparts in other schools to be teaching outside their field of training or teaching without a license.

- *Over time, these factors in combination with chronic low achievement can cause stress and disorganization in schools.* Teachers reduce their expectations of students and eventually burn out; many are frequently absent and seek transfers to other schools, so the faculty lacks the stability needed for long-term improvement. The task of changing seems overwhelming, and motivation for reform can evaporate. In these schools, connections with parents and the community are often weak or hostile. Parents and teachers often blame each other for failure, instead of working together to raise expectations of students and improve student performance.[3]

- *Low student achievement is usually accompanied by high rates of student absenteeism, dropping out, and delinquency.* Many students do not master necessary skills as they pass on to the next grade or drop out.

These conditions pose major challenges to states and districts facing the need to improve low-performing schools. But they are problems that must be overcome. Schools are charged with teaching students the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics, instilling values of citizenship, and developing students' skills in technology and critical thinking to prepare them to excel in a fast-changing, global economy. For children from low-income families and poor communities in particular, education has always been the route to broader opportunity.

While improving low-performing schools is not simple or easy, it is possible. Across the country, there are examples of high-poverty, low-achieving schools, serving diverse communities and facing difficult obstacles, that have turned around and raised student performance:

- Middlesex Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland, once ranked among the 10 worst schools in its district. Identified as a failing school by the state and facing the threat of a state takeover, the school community pulled together to develop a comprehensive school improvement plan. Despite the odds, Middlesex Elementary School rose from the bottom ranks of student achievement and today places 35th among more than 100 elementary schools in the district.

- After being placed on probation in Chicago because only 11 percent of its students read on grade level, Amundsen High School began a turnaround effort focused on reading. Through concentrated efforts by the whole school staff to coordinate instruction across classrooms, and intense professional development aimed at instruction, in one year Amundsen High School doubled the percentage of students reading on grade level. Turning the tide set the stage for continued improvement by raising confidence among teachers and students that change was possible.

- When the Miami-Dade County Public School System identified Biscayne Gardens Elementary School as a "critically low" performing school, there was anger and apprehension. Change was not easy. But the school's staff worked together and, with the support of the district's program for low-performing schools, student performance on the district's assessment has risen for three consecutive years in both reading and mathematics.

- Hillcrest Middle School in Ysleta, Texas, was given the state's lowest "Priority I" rating in 1992 — only 15 percent of students passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). This high-poverty school on the Mexican border had high faculty turnover (almost 70 percent a year), low parent involvement, and low expectations of students. By committing to the idea that all children can learn and implementing a schoolwide program that focused all efforts on improving learning, the school began to change. Today, Hillcrest Middle School is a "Recognized" school in the Texas system, with over 80 percent of students passing all portions of the state assessment.

While much of what needs to happen to turn around low-performing schools takes place at the school site, states and districts have the responsibility to set the context for change and help raise the capacity of schools to focus on teaching and learning. Low-performing schools need strong leaders and the active involvement of the entire school community — parents, teachers, administrators, school boards, teacher unions, and students — to improve. Schools need to focus on learning and improving what happens between teachers and students in the classroom. Strong actions by states and districts — in the form of both performance accountability and support for schools — are critical to improving low-performing schools.

The strategies listed to the right outline some of the approaches that states and districts can take to help turn around chronically low-performing schools. Many are discussed in detail throughout this guide and are illustrated by districts and schools that have improved student achievement, classroom practices, and school atmosphere.

Because low-performing schools rarely have the capacity to make the kinds of changes required to turn around on their own, persistently low-performing schools need technical assistance, encouragement, intervention, and hope. U.S. Department of Education resources provide many of these supports. Through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Goals 2000, and other programs, the Department is committed to helping states and districts develop high standards, strengthen teacher and school accountability, implement schoolwide improvements, extend public school choice, and support other strategies to improve student performance for those who do not meet challenging standards.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: Pathways to Progress

✔Set high expectations for students.
✔Hold schools accountable for performance.
✔Provide a safe learning environment.
✔Create leaders at school and district levels.
✔Let leaders lead.
✔Recruit and retain the best teachers.
✔Train teachers in instruction and curriculum.
✔Support students with extra help and time.
✔Involve the community in schooling.
✔Create smaller schools.
✔Close or reconstitute bad schools.

— Adapted from *Education Week*, January 8, 1998

New U.S. Department of Education Initiatives to Offer Resources And Hope for Turning Around Low-Performing Schools

- In addition to providing resources for school improvement through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000, the Department will make available $145 million in new funding through the **Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program**. The additional funding and assistance will help accelerate school improvement and turn around low-performing schools through high-quality, research-based models that support comprehensive school reform programs.

- President Clinton has proposed initiatives for:

  Education Opportunity Zones to assist urban and rural school districts with high concentrations of children from low-income families to expand the scope and accelerate the pace of their educational reforms; and

  New funding to help school districts, particularly poor urban and rural school districts, **reduce class size** in grades 1-3, recruit and train new teachers, and modernize buildings.

This guide examines state and district efforts to raise student performance by setting high standards and holding schools accountable for results. It explores strategies related to strengthening the school focus on learning and policies that districts can employ to build the capacity of schools to improve teaching and learning systemwide. The guide includes examples of states and districts that are working to create the conditions for school transformation and intervening in chronically low-performing schools. The guide offers concrete suggestions for policy makers, educators, parents, and community members about how to turn around low-performing schools. It concludes with an inventory of support for school improvement available from the U.S. Department of Education.

Raising the Stakes: Setting High Standards for Performance

Today, the public is increasingly impatient with poor school performance. Indeed, according to some surveys, support for public education itself is at risk.[4] In response, states and districts across the nation are adopting policies to hold schools accountable for student achievement. In doing so, these jurisdictions are setting standards for school performance, creating assessments aligned with standards to measure performance, identifying their lowest performing schools, and making data on school performance available for use in school improvement.

> *If we expect all students to learn at high levels, then we must define what we expect schools to teach and what we expect students to learn. These expectations need to be clearly communicated to and understood by students, parents, school professionals and the community.*
>
> — *Office of Accountability, Chicago Public Schools*

Setting high standards for performance is a first step. Almost all states now have content standards in place and are developing challenging student performance standards aligned with state assessments. School districts such as Corpus Christi, Texas, have developed their own high academic standards. Their "Real World Academic Standards" are even more challenging than Texas' state standards and explain what students are expected to know at every level from pre-kindergarten through high school graduation.

Districts can take lessons and use information from organizations such as New Standards, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Science Foundation that have supported the development of high standards for achievement in core subject areas. The State Education Improvement Partnership — a collaboration among state-based organizations including the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, the National Governors' Association, and others — offers technical assistance to states to leverage school improvement. Among the services offered, the organization has developed a standards review and benchmarking service. A team of experts analyzes state standards and makes recommendations about how states can strengthen standards.

The creation of high standards alone is not enough; districts must have the means to assess school and student performance against standards, hold schools accountable for results, and implement policies to assist schools that do not meet standards. To achieve these objectives, states and districts are employing a continuum of interventions — from providing extra resources and technical assistance, to instituting sanctions and reorganizing, restructuring, or closing schools that fail to improve.

States and districts also are using their standards to hold students more accountable for performance. In an effort to end "social promotion" practices that allow students to pass from grade to grade without having mastered the required skills, a number of states require districts and schools to use state standards and assessments to determine if students can be promoted at key grades. Districts such as Houston and Chicago have developed explicit policies to end social promotion practices. In Chicago, students who perform below minimum standards at key transition grades (3, 6, 8, and 9) must participate in a seven-week summer bridge program and pass a test before moving on to the next grade. In 1997, about 41,000 students were required to attend the summer bridge program, and of those who took the test again at the end of the summer, almost half passed. Ninth graders attending the program showed an average one-and-half-year gain in their reading and math scores.[5]

Holding Schools Accountable

No school improvement can succeed without real accountability for results. Turning around low-performing schools requires that state and district leaders take active steps to set high expectations for schools and students, establish the means to measure performance against those expectations, and create policies to identify and provide assistance to those schools and students that fail to meet high standards for performance:

- The 1995 Amendatory Act to the Illinois School Code empowered Chicago to work on ensuring academic improvement through the establishment of one of the nation's strongest district accountability systems. The system includes policies to: set standards for learning, end social promotion, institute regular school quality reviews and a system of teacher accountability, pursue intervention policies for low-performing schools, and provide management support for schools.

- Kentucky's Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990 addressed all aspects of the state's education system from curriculum, assessment, and professional development, to finances and school governance. Since KERA was enacted, over 90 percent of Kentucky schools have shown improvement.

- Since 1984, Texas has been developing an extensive school accountability system based on student performance.

> *To lay a firm foundation for school success, a state system of school support must be comprehensive and linked to school improvement plans and other federal programs. The state is uniquely positioned to …set challenging standards; hold schools and districts accountable; ensure that technical assistance is delivered; and identify the federal, state and local financial resources to get the job done.*
>
> *— Council of Chief State School Officers*

Rewards and sanctions are part of the system. The Texas Learning Index shows that in 1996, scores improved across the board in mathematics and reading. The proportion of students passing the state assessment has improved from 55 percent in 1994 to 74 percent in 1997. The greatest improvements have been among African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged children.

These efforts are supported by federal programs that are designed to help states and districts create the means to hold schools accountable for student achievement. States can use funds from the Goals 2000: Educate America Act to begin or continue systemic, statewide education reform. Under Title I, states must establish standards and assessment systems to measure the progress of all children, as well as identify schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress.

Identifying Low-Performing Schools

One central piece in state and district accountability systems, mandated by Title I, is the establishment of procedures and standards for defining and identifying low-performing schools. For example:

- Maryland has established a school performance index to determine if a school is meeting state expectations. To meet satisfactory standards, schools must maintain a 94 percent attendance rate, have 70 percent of students scoring at the satisfactory level on the state assessment, and have no more than a 3 percent high school dropout rate.

Improving America's Schools Through Title I

Supported by Goals 2000 and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, states are developing student assessments that will help determine how well all children are meeting challenging state standards. Along with assessments, states are required to develop a definition of "adequate yearly progress" for meeting the expectations of high standards in schools served by Title I.

Title I schools that achieve more than adequate yearly progress for three years are identified as "distinguished" schools and can play a mentoring role to other schools in their district or state. For example, 230 Title I schools in Texas this year received recognition for high performance for having 75 percent of students pass each section of the state assessment, a dropout rate of less than 1 percent, and an attendance rate of at least 94 percent.

Title I schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years are identified as in need of improvement. School districts must provide technical assistance to failing schools to develop a plan for improvement. If the schools continue to fail to make progress, the district must intervene. In the event that the district effort fails, the state must intervene.

- In New York, at least 90 percent of students in each school are expected to score at or above state benchmarks. In addition, no school's dropout rate should exceed 5 percent. Schools that fail to achieve minimum performance standards risk having their registration placed under review.

- The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) establishes a baseline starting point and academic goals for each school in the state. The state has projected goals for student performance through the year 2010. Schools that exceed the goals are eligible for financial awards, and schools that fall behind are designated "in decline." The lowest-performing schools, designated as "schools in crisis," are those whose performance declines by more than 5 percent of their baseline for two consecutive assessment cycles.

- The Texas Education Agency annually collects data on its more than 1,000 school districts and 3.7 million students. With this information, in conjunction with results from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Texas extensively disaggregates student performance data and measures not only a school's progress but also student performance across a range of racial/ethnic and income groups. In order to make adequate yearly progress, Texas schools must obtain an "acceptable" rating from the state's accountability system — a rating that requires at least 40 percent of all students and student groups to pass each section of the TAAS, a dropout rate of no more than 6 percent, and an attendance rate of at least 94 percent. These standards increase each year.

- San Francisco Unified School District uses nine performance indicators to identify low-performing schools, including the percentage of students who score below the 25th percentile on the district assessment; the numbers of suspensions, dropouts, and student absences in schools; the percentage of teachers who are long-term substitutes; and the number of students requesting open enrollment transfers out of certain schools.

As part of this emphasis on accountability, data gathered from state and district assessments are informing the public about school performance. Eighteen states including Florida, Maryland, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wisconsin, distribute report cards that display information about student learning in every school in the state. These report cards are helping stakeholders judge how well schools are achieving their long-range goals and how schools measure up to other schools with similar student populations. For example:

- The New York State Education Department issues a report card for every school each year. These report cards allow for comparisons of student achievement results across a cohort of similar schools based on the likeness of the age range served by the school, the resource capacity of the district, and the economic need of the school's students.

- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system distributes easy-to-read student learning goals to parents at the beginning of the school year. The district follows up with school report cards on student attendance and performance that are distributed to parents and every household in the district and are published in the newspaper.

The establishment of state and local systems of accountability has been important for leveraging change in low-performing schools. In many cases, being publicly identified as low-performing has been a necessary impetus for change. But it is only the first step on the road to improvement. Turning around low-performing schools requires tough choices and a focus on strategies that will improve curriculum, teaching, and learning. In addition, real school transformation demands changes in the relationships among adults within schools and between educators and parents, school and community leaders, unions, district officials, and partners at all levels of government. School reform requires a willingness to learn, to alter old practices, and to act in new ways.

Focus on Learning: Promising Strategies for Improving Student Achievement

---

A recent study of 26 high-achieving, high-poverty schools in Texas bolsters decades of effective schools research. Effective schools exhibit the following characteristics: a strong focus on ensuring academic success for each student; a refusal to accept excuses for poor performance; a willingness to experiment with a variety of strategies; intensive and sustained efforts to involve parents and the community; an environment of mutual respect and collaboration; and a passion for continuous improvement and professional growth.[6]

There is no single program or new practice that can transform low-performing schools into effective schools. States and districts must help schools choose and sustain a coherent improvement strategy that matches school needs, and help schools focus on improving curriculum and classroom instruction and aligning all school operations with that priority. To support these improvements, state and local leaders need to implement districtwide policies to create a safe environment for learning, help prepare young children to be ready for school, offer students challenging course work, extend learning time for students who do not meet challenging standards, prepare teachers to provide high-quality instruction, and share current research on effective school improvement models.

Gaining Control of the School Environment: A Prerequisite

Surveys of the American public reveal that citizens are concerned about teaching children values and discipline, and keeping drugs away from schools.[7] Creating a safe learning environment is an essential prerequisite to learning; a school cannot implement instructional innovation if it does not first establish order. District and state policies must help school leaders maintain order so that teachers and students can focus on learning. For example:

> *It was obvious the atmosphere was just a zoo. Kids all over the halls, getting high in the stairwells, drug deals going on left and right. It was just a circus. Attendance was atrocious, dropout rate was high, test scores low. Everything was negative. So just one step in the building and you knew that something was wrong.*
>
> *— A Baltimore guidance counselor's description of her school environment*

- In 1994, all schools in Long Beach, California, adopted a school uniform requirement. Since then, school crime has dropped by 76 percent. Proponents say that school uniforms decrease fighting over clothes, are convenient for parents, and give students a sense of common identity.

- Marshall Middle School in Houston, Texas, turned its undisciplined environment around using a program called Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline, which seeks to improve instruction by building self-discipline among students. The idea is that as students become citizens of their schools, they begin to take responsibility for their actions and the actions of others. As the discipline referral and absenteeism rates at Marshall declined, student achievement and instructional time increased. By not having to respond to as many disciplinary problems, each teacher gained an average of 30 extra minutes a day — the equivalent of an extra 15 days of instruction per year. In 1995-96 Marshall Middle School was removed from district and state lists of low-performing schools.

Improving the school learning environment requires more than the implementation of get-tough disciplinary measures. It also means creating an atmosphere of respect for students and sharing with them the responsibilities of maintaining a high-quality learning environment. Only when staff and teachers make the effort to get to know their students and form caring relationships of mutual respect can learning take place.

Improving Curriculum and Classroom Instruction

The bottom line for all schools — and the most important area of reform for low-performing schools — is providing curricula and instruction that help children reach challenging academic standards. Districts can support this effort by establishing curricular and instructional requirements, demanding that schools offer challenging course work, and helping students who fall behind or need extra academic assistance.

Focused Curriculum

Strategies for school improvement must focus on the particular academic needs of students. While it seems obvious, many schools pay inadequate attention to providing high-quality instruction and using resources in ways that best enhance the quality of what happens in the classroom.

- When Superintendent Diana Lam of San Antonio, Texas, decided to take on the reorganization of high schools in her district, she faced an unfocused system. San Antonio's high schools offered approximately 2,600 different courses. Lam cut back central office staff and reallocated resources to create an instructional guide for each high school to focus on curriculum and instruction, rather than administration. To focus the schools on instruction, she is working to create smaller learning communities — academies — driven by rigorous curriculum and high standards.

Boston Public Schools' Plan for School Change: What Do Schools Look Like When They Focus on Student Learning?

Using a schoolwide instructional focus to meet students' needs and end "projectitis"

- ✔ Practices in all classrooms that support the instructional focus
- ✔ Classroom setups that support the instructional focus
- ✔ Consistent materials
- ✔ Coherent schedule with few interruptions
- ✔ Resources used strategically to support the instructional focus
- ✔ All school personnel engaged in instruction
- ✔ Cluster meetings focused on teaching and learning
- ✔ Alignment of school vision with instructional focus

Looking at student work and data in relation to the Citywide Learning Standards to identify students' needs, improve assignments and instruction, assess student progress, and inform professional development

- ✔ Teachers developing exemplars of good work
- ✔ Displays of student work that meet standards and reflects the instructional focus
- ✔ Professional development based on teachers' and students' needs
- ✔ Peer coaching
- ✔ Assessments aligned with teaching and standards
- ✔ Administrators and teachers analyzing achievement data to reveal instructional needs
- ✔ Public criteria for assessing student work
- ✔ Student portfolios

Creating a targeted professional development plan that gives teachers and principals what they need to improve instruction in core subjects

- ✔ Professional development plan that is developed with and by teachers; is driven by data; aligns all activities with the instructional focus; pools all resources; includes ongoing assessment of student learning as an integral part of school life; identifies responsibilities, strategies, and time lines; and evaluates effectiveness of activities
- ✔ Cluster leaders that develop and support principal and teacher networks

— The Annenberg Foundation

In 1993, the Houston Independent School District targeted Thomas J. Rusk Elementary School for reconstitution. The school's students, more than half with limited English proficiency and about 75 percent from low-income households, routinely scored below the 30th percentile on the Texas state assessment. Extensive research into the particular needs of the school's students led Rusk to implement a bilingual immersion program for students with limited proficiency in English. In subsequent years, scores among fourth graders on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills have risen dramatically, improving from 50 percent to 67 percent of students passing all portions of the test. Between 1995 and 1996 alone, the percentage of third grade students passing all portions rose from 47 to 66 percent. The implementation of the program improved not only achievement but also the whole school climate and the school's relationship with the community.

A recent study of successful high-poverty schools in Maryland attributes improvements in reading to a number of factors, including a focus on reading across the entire school and small group teaching.[8] While the study found that there was no single successful model, it did show that reading must be a central focus for curricular and instruction reforms, particularly in low-performing and high-poverty schools. Programs such as Success for All, Reading Roots, and Reading Recovery have been implemented in schools to help students learn to read:

- After determining that half of its middle school students were reading below grade level, staff in Wilkes County Schools in Washington, Georgia, made intensive reading instruction a priority. The district has worked to upgrade professional development in reading instruction and reduce class size, helping teachers work with individual students.

- Since the Chancellor's District took over P.S. 154 in Harlem and the staff redesigned it in 1996, student reading scores on a statewide assessment have improved significantly. The gain in student achievement in reading occurred after the school chose a concentrated reading program, organized an education plan around it, and trained all teachers to implement the plan. In the first year, the school experienced a 20 percent increase in the number of third-grade students meeting state standards in reading. The state has now removed P.S. 154 from its list of low-performing schools.

- Some entire districts are using Success for All districtwide to ensure that every third-grader reads on grade level. For instance, Memphis Public Schools implemented the program in 17 schools in 1995. The program worked to improve the reading skills of at-risk children, particularly low achieving students, who benefitted from the program's tutoring and grouping of students into homogenous, cross-grade sections for smaller language arts classes.

More important than the particular program pursued by any of these schools and districts is a commitment to sticking with a carefully chosen program plan to improve classroom instruction. An important lesson these schools learned is that to achieve marked improvements in student performance, districts and schools must stay the course and sustain their school improvement efforts over the long-term.

Academic Challenge

Many schools have low expectations for achievement; consequently, students are less likely to master basic skills and knowledge or to take and complete demanding courses.

Districts that Promote Challenging Math Courses Lay the Groundwork for Excellence and Opportunity

Students who study algebra in middle school and plan to take advanced mathematics and science courses in high school have an advantage: 83 percent of students who take algebra I and geometry go on to college within two years of their scheduled high school graduation. Yet, 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress data reveal that only 25 percent of U.S. eighth graders enrolled in algebra courses; low-income and minority students were even less likely to take algebra in eighth grade.

Some math programs in the United States are now integrating the fundamentals of algebra and geometry into the middle school curriculum. However, not all students have access to rigorous mathematics courses, either because their schools do not offer everyone a full selection of challenging courses or because not all students are prepared for and encouraged to take them. The results of the recent Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) confirm that students do well in math through fourth grade but then drop off in middle school, and many enter and leave high school without a solid grounding in mathematics, closing doors very early for further education and better careers.

To address this, many states and districts are trying to ensure that virtually all students take rigorous college preparatory mathematics and science classes. For example, the College Board's EQUITY 2000 project, launched in Nashville, Tennessee, Public Schools and other districts with a high percentage of disadvantaged and minority students, requires districts to phase out lower-level mathematics in favor of a college preparatory curriculum for all students. The results:

- All sites dramatically increased the percentage of students enrolled in algebra I by the ninth grade, and in three pilot districts all ninth graders enrolled in algebra I.

- The percentage of students passing algebra I did not decline significantly, and in some cases rose as more students from the discontinued lower tracks began enrolling in algebra classes.

Research shows that students from affluent backgrounds take algebra and geometry at much higher rates than do students from low-income families, and they take more difficult courses earlier in their academic careers. Thus, low-income students do not benefit as much as their peers from high-quality academic preparation, including more advanced mathematics and science courses in high school. This limits their rates of college enrollment and completion, their ability to enroll in the full array of college majors, and their capacity to obtain the necessary skills for high-paying careers.

Districts can help schools by promoting policies that encourage *all* students to learn basic and advanced skills in the elementary schools, enroll in challenging prerequisite courses (such as algebra and geometry) early in secondary school, and build on their education throughout high school with rigorous course work.

Extending Learning Time to Help All Children Meet High Standards

Holding students to higher standards and accountability for performance and requiring students to take challenging courses means schools and districts must help students who need assistance to keep up and to prepare for the future. Research shows that students who repeat a year rarely catch up and are more likely to drop out. Thus, states and districts need to help create mechanisms so that schools do not face a choice, in the face of increasing standards and accountability policies, of promoting unprepared students or retaining them for another year.[9]

- Newark, New Jersey, helps children who have been retained to catch up and rejoin their peers. In 1995, Project ACCEL (Accelerating the Learning of At-Risk Students) helped students retained in grades six and seven in five schools by training teachers in specific instructional methods, using computers and scientific equipment, involving parents, and partnering with external organizations. ACCEL students consequently showed higher proficiency gains than non-ACCEL students did on an achievement test.

Many districts have implemented policies to extend learning time so that students do not fall behind and need to be retained. They use year-round, before- or after-school, and summer school programs for this purpose. For example:

- The Long Beach school district in California required 1,600 third-graders who had not attained reading proficiency by the end of the year to attend a five-week tutorial session.

- In Halifax County, North Carolina, the district pays high school honor students to tutor younger students in reading one-and-a-half-hours per day. The district also hires retired teachers to work with struggling students.

- In Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a 5,300-student elementary school district, all nine schools stay open twelve hours a day, year-round. The program began a decade ago to keep children safe after school. It now includes tutoring and serves almost half the district's students.

State and local leaders are pursuing these and other policies to give additional academic assistance to struggling students and help schools focus on instruction to end social promotion, hold students accountable, and raise expectations for all students. This involves fundamental rethinking about how classroom time and district resources are focused. It also requires a willingness to make districtwide changes in teaching and student promotion policies that are necessary to help all students succeed.

Starting Early for School Readiness

A growing body of research recognizes the vital effects of the early childhood environment on development and school success. Studies show that high-quality preschool programs can accelerate the development of children, especially children who live in high-poverty communities. A home environment and pre-kindergarten experience that support learning, combined with continuity between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, are important to a child's transition into formal education. Many elementary schools and districts prepare children for high achievement by providing early childhood and pre-kindergarten services. Yet, children from low-income families are about half as likely as children from high-income families to attend preschool programs.[10] Because there is such a strong relationship between poverty, student achievement, and low-performing schools, districts can further their focus on learning by intervening early to help children to be ready to learn.

Family literacy programs, such as Even Start, use strategies that emphasize multiple supports for school readiness: early childhood education, adult literacy, parenting education, and parent/child interaction time. Even Start projects help parents gain the literacy and parenting skills they need to become full partners in educating their young children. For example, the Even Start project in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, operates three early childhood classrooms and focuses on the emerging literacy of children in a bilingual setting. Parents as Teachers home visitors show families creative ways to use household items such as educational toys. The program provides health and hearing screening for children, as well as field trips and cultural activities for families.

Other federally funded programs also can help prepare children for school. The Grants for Infants and Families program provides resources to identify infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two, implement family-focused service systems, coordinate early intervention services, and provide vital services that otherwise would not be available. The Preschool Grants program funds services for children with disabilities aged three through five to aid their transition to school and to reduce the number who need special education services when they enter school. Early intervention for children with special needs can be critical to raising the capacity of students to thrive in the school environment.

Evidence from a Chicago Longitudinal Study documents the importance of early childhood intervention. Title I-funded Child-Parent Centers in Chicago offer up to six years of intervention services for children from ages three to nine. Similar to centers in the Even Start program, these centers provide early childhood education and require parents to be involved in learning activities. Classroom activities are designed to develop language and reading skills, as well as social growth. In Chicago, Child-Parent Center participants had significantly higher reading and math scores than the nonparticipant comparison group at the end of third grade. These differences persisted even to eighth grade.

Preparing for Classroom Change: Professional Development

Professional development is essential to helping educators improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach and the way they teach. To be effective, professional development must engage teachers collectively as active learners. It must give them skills to use the material in their classrooms and provide an ongoing opportunity to build knowledge. Most importantly, professional development activities must be aligned with a school's focus on learning and must provide training for teachers to improve instruction in the classroom.

One of the best examples of a district's unwavering focus on improving curriculum and instruction is Community School District #2 in New York City, which serves a diverse population from the Upper East Side to Chinatown. This district focuses on improving instruction through intensive, on-going, and sustained staff development. The district allocates a large percentage of its total resources for professional development, which was made possible only through cutting district office overhead and non-instructional positions in the district's schools.

> *The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Those who have worked to improve education over the last decade have learned that school reform cannot be "teacher-proofed." Success in any aspect of reform — whether creating standards, developing more challenging curriculum and assessments, implementing school-based management, or inventing new model schools and programs — depends on highly skilled teachers.*
>
> *— National Commission on Teaching & America's Future*

One of the district's key strategies is maintaining a Professional Development Laboratory where visiting teachers observe and practice with a resident teacher for three weeks while teachers who have already participated in the laboratory teach their students. Teachers and principals frequently visit other classrooms and schools. In addition, the district has a corps of consultants who are available to schools for one-on-one and small group assistance. The district works particularly closely with teachers it identifies as in need of assistance. In cases where a teacher refuses to work to develop his or her instructional skills or fails to improve, the district will transfer the teacher out of the district or help to counsel the teacher out of the profession.

Effective professional development often takes teachers outside their own schools or districts to "see" reform in action in successful schools. For example:

- As part of the Marion Ewing Kauffman Foundation's Successful School Program, principals and teachers from three schools in Kansas City, Missouri, visited a school in Community School District #2. Because they had never known anything but the way things worked in their own schools, the experience was transforming. The teachers began to get a sense of possibility about what they could achieve in their own schools and in their own classrooms.

Other states and districts are involved in efforts to improve teaching through effective professional development. Many of these efforts involve teachers mentoring other teachers or providing peer assistance. Although most such programs are voluntary and are not specifically targeted toward low-performing schools, they do allow teachers in low-performing school to reach out for help:

- San Antonio has created a districtwide cadre of instructional guides to facilitate the professional development of teachers in all of its 93 schools. As Superintendent Diana Lam explains, "Research points out two missing elements from most professional development efforts: coaching and collaboration." This program is designed to provide teachers with peer coaches, mentors, and collaborative colleagues.

- States including North Carolina, Ohio, New Mexico, and Kentucky, and school districts such as Los Angeles, St. Paul, Cincinnati, and New York City provide incentives and salary increases to reward teachers who receive certification as master teachers from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). The St. Paul district is collaborating with the teachers' union and the University of Minnesota to support teachers through the NBPTS certification process. The district pays the application fees, and the university and other partners develop and conduct professional support programs for the candidates.

- Districts such as Toledo, Cincinnati, and Seattle and the state of Connecticut have implemented peer review and assistance programs to help teachers, particularly new teachers, improve their classroom techniques. These programs help beginning teachers learn to teach and assist veterans who are having difficulty to improve their teaching or leave the classroom without union grievances or delays.

- In Columbus, Ohio, exemplary teachers are assigned as "consulting teachers" to mentor new teachers and intervene when teachers experience difficulty in the classroom.

- In Rochester, New York, a rigorous evaluation process selects expert teachers to be "lead teachers" and gives them significant salary stipends to become involved with peer counseling, or to take on other reform-related priorities such as consulting with new teachers, accepting positions in "intervention" schools, and developing curricula.

- In New York City, low-performing teachers can be assigned to an intervention program where they receive assistance from colleagues and administrators, and if unable to improve, are counseled out of the profession or removed.

> *I think it's good to get the teachers, not just the administrators, out to other schools where things are working and actually have them visit that school. Really to see it hands on. It's one thing to read about it, but it's another thing to actually go and see it.*
>
> *—Elementary school teacher*

Schools and districts often neglect professional development. In many cases, they use professional development time to discuss district or school policies rather than to raise the capacity of teachers to be effective in their classrooms and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. Districts that take professional development seriously find it helpful to reschedule the school day to accommodate time for training, discussion, and collaborative planning among teachers. Yet efforts to restructure the day or add professional development time into teacher schedules fall short if staff continue to teach in the same way. Those who understand the enterprise of teaching know it is an extremely complex and difficult profession that requires on-going and high-quality professional training opportunities.

Implementing Comprehensive Reform Programs

Comprehensive school improvement strategies may offer particular promise for reforming chronically low-performing schools. Schoolwide strategies recognize that low performance has multiple causes and dimensions that cannot be solved by a single program or uncoordinated improvements. Comprehensive school reform works on the theory that school improvement must address all aspects of school effectiveness, including rigorous curriculum and high standards, efficient school governance, solid community-school partnerships, on-going staff development, up-to-date technology, and increased parent involvement.

What Are the Components of a Comprehensive School Reform Program?

✓ **Effective, research-based methods and strategies**: A comprehensive school reform program employs innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices, and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics.

✓ **Comprehensive design with aligned components**: The program has a comprehensive design for effective school functioning, including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management, that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a schoolwide reform plan designed to enable all students — including children from low-income families, children with limited English proficiency, and children with disabilities — to meet challenging state content and performance standards and addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment.

✓ **Professional development**: The program provides high-quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training.

✓ **Measurable goals and benchmarks**: The program has measurable goals for student performance tied to the state's challenging content and student performance standards, and as those standards are implemented, benchmarks for meeting the goals.

✓ **Support within the school**: School faculty, administrators, and staff support the comprehensive school reform program.

✓ **Parental and community involvement**: The program meaningfully involves parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities.

✓ **External technical support and assistance**: A comprehensive reform program uses high-quality external support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (maybe a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement.

✓ **Evaluation strategies**: The program includes a plan to evaluate the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved.

✓ **Coordination of resources**: The program identifies how other resources (federal, state, local, and private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform.

— Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Guidance, U.S. Department of Education

Beginning in 1998, the U.S. Department of Education will distribute $145 million to districts and schools implementing high-quality, research-based comprehensive school reform programs. This Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program will allow districts to target their lowest performing schools for improvement.

A number of research-based models serve as promising components of comprehensive school reform programs. For example, Success for All, an intensive reading program, includes 90 minutes of reading instruction per day, student assessment every eight weeks, tutoring in reading by certified teachers, cooperative learning, small homogeneous ability groups in reading, and often a family support and outreach team. Miami-Dade and Memphis are implementing the program to help raise student achievement in many of their lowest performing schools.

High Schools That Work is a model targeted to improving the achievement of career-bound high school students. The model strives to eliminate the "general education" track and upgrade the curriculum and instruction for all students by setting high expectations, increasing student access to technical studies, improving students' problem-solving skills, and providing work-based opportunities for student learning.

A key element of comprehensive reform programs is the use of outside facilitators to help schools implement models. New American Schools, for example, an organization that offers numerous schoolwide improvement

Supporting Comprehensive School Reform: The Role of States and Districts

States must:

- Assure fit between reform models and the state's instructional strategies.
- Assess district capacity to support comprehensive reform.
- Play a continuing role in assessing success of models and comprehensive reform programs.

Districts must:

- Help schools choose models that best meet the needs of their students.
- Ensure that district strategies are aligned and work in tandem with comprehensive school reform efforts.
- Create a new district operating environment — change budgeting, use of categorical funds, personnel authority, accountability, professional development — that will support comprehensive reform.
- Find an approach to supporting comprehensive reform that fits the district — not just an individual school.
- Monitor and control the quality and performance of model design teams or other technical assistance providers.
- Create a public engagement process that informs parents and the community about comprehensive school reform.

— Consortium for Policy Research in Education

models, has helped more than 700 schools implement its designs. Design assistance teams cooperate with school staff and the community in making changes that are required for comprehensive reform. The design teams provide schools with information and guidance, help build ownership of the transformation process, and build the school's capacity to reallocate resources and effectively improve student performance. For their part, schools must conduct a needs assessment and work to create the conditions within to support the design implementation. This includes reallocating funds, aligning professional development in a cohesive plan, redefining staff roles, building community support, and changing the school governance structure.

Models That Can Help Improve Low-Performing Schools

The U.S. Department of Education's new Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program will support the implementation of high-quality, research-based comprehensive reform models in schools embarking on whole school change. School reform models that have been identified in the legislation include:

- Accelerated Schools
- ATLAS Communities
- Audrey Cohen College
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- Community for Learning
- Co-NECT
- Direct Instruction
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
- High Schools That Work
- Modern Red Schoolhouse
- National Alliance for Restructuring Education
- Paideia
- Roots and Wings
- School Development Program
- Success for All
- Talent Development High School
- Urban Learning Center

This list is not exhaustive. Other sources for finding out about models and education reform networks include:

- Education Commission of the States' *A Policymaker's Guide to Education Reform Networks* (1997)
- Kentucky Department of Education's *Results Practices Showcase (1997-98)*
- Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's *Catalog of School Reform Models: First Edition* (March 1998)

Although comprehensive programs are implemented on a school-by-school basis, districts must provide essential leadership, resources, and support strategies. On a practical level, many districts have hosted "model fairs" that bring together school staff and design assistance teams to explore options and exchange information. Some districts, including San Antonio, Cincinnati, and Memphis, are committing to adopting comprehensive school reforms in a large proportion of their schools. Cincinnati expects to implement comprehensive designs in a minimum of 24 schools during the 1998-99 school year. The cost of implementing the designs is the responsibility of the school. Districts can help schools reallocate their budgets, and show them how they can pool their Title I and other resources to leverage comprehensive school improvement efforts and pay for reform models.

Building School Capacity: Systemic Support for the Process of Change

Much of the drive behind creating a performance-based public education system comes from the fundamental assumption that if schools are held accountable for student performance, student achievement will rise, attendance will go up, and other measures of improvement will be evident. However, in holding schools accountable, states and districts are often making tremendous demands on schools that have little capacity to turn themselves around.

Low-performing schools often are located in communities where families live in concentrated poverty; there are usually low expectations for students; students are not encouraged to take demanding courses; many teachers are burnt out; and school facilities are run down, overcrowded, and disorderly. For many chronically low-performing schools, the task of change may seem overwhelming. In some low-performing schools, there is little will to change.

> *Districts must stay the course with a plan for school change. Coherence, continuity, and follow through are extremely important. Educators can become cynical with good reason about reform when each year the "new" program of the year is announced. Whatever model or strategy is used to turn around low-performing schools, it must be based on the commitment to stay focused.*
>
> *-Tom Payzant, Boston Public Schools Superintendent*

Some of these overwhelming hurdles are made worse by systemwide problems that further decrease their capacity to improve. Low-performing schools often are embedded in troubled school systems.

Therefore, part of the process of turning around low-performing schools involves making changes on the district level that encourage and reward successful schools and mobilize resources to assist troubled schools. States and districts must commit to a long-term and continuous process of school improvement. Where reform strategies fail in schools, there are often budget cuts, mixed messages on district priorities, decisions from the central office to move on to a new initiative and drop support for current priorities, excessive red tape, or inefficient use of resources at the district or school level.

States and districts must help create an environment that supports school efforts to improve. The elements of a supportive environment outlined below give structure to schools' transformation efforts. Districts can help make the difference between student success and failure by:

- Helping schools build leadership, trust, ownership, and a shared vision of change among school staff;

- Effectively mobilizing district resources to support school change;

- Using data to drive reform in assessing school performance, selecting improvement strategies that meet a school's particular needs, setting high goals, creating strategic plans for improvement, and measuring progress so that the process of change becomes a cycle of continuous improvement;

- Promoting parental involvement and community support by developing partnerships to bolster reform efforts; and

- Stimulating innovation and change by creating high-performance incentives for schools.

Critical Attributes of a Supportive Environment for School Transformation

✔ Clear academic standards and aligned assessments of student performance.

✔ A professional development program that helps teachers improve classroom practices and student achievement.

✔ Decentralized authority for making decisions about curriculum, instruction, staffing, and resource allocations.

✔ Sustained investments in strategies for school improvement.

✔ A public outreach strategy that engages schools, students, and the community around the performance of schools and districts; builds awareness of the need for high-performing schools; and generates support for schools.

— Adapted from New American Schools

Building Leadership, Trust, and Ownership

In *every* case of a turnaround school, the transformation required leadership, trust, teacher buy-in, and a sense of common mission among stakeholders. While this must happen largely within the school building, districts have significant discretion to recruit strong principals, teachers, and other motivated school leaders and assign them where they are most needed.

Strong Educational Leaders

A strong school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:

- ✔ facilitating the development of a shared vision of learning;
- ✔ sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
- ✔ creating a safe, effective learning environment;
- ✔ mobilizing and collaborating with families and community members;
- ✔ acting ethically with integrity and fairness; and
- ✔ understanding and influencing the larger political and cultural context.

— Council of Chief State School Officers

Strong, consistent leadership is a particular challenge both on the district and school level. In the nation's largest urban school districts, superintendents serve an average of less than three years, giving them little time to instill lasting changes in low-performing schools.[11]

Strong principals who act as instructional leaders are important to school success, but principals often are placed in their roles with little attention to their instructional skills. Many districts strongly emphasize the principal's administrative responsibilities, from organizing the school bus routes and schedules to handling personnel issues. To the extent that principals are able to focus their work on improving instruction, students will benefit.

- New York City Community School District #2 Superintendent Anthony Alvarado insists on choosing instructional leaders as principals. If he does not find a candidate who can teach classes and assess strengths and weaknesses after observing classroom situations, Alvarado begins the search anew. The attention has contributed to improving schools; District #2's math scores ranked second in the city in 1996, up from the middle of the pack a decade earlier.

Local policy makers have differing levels of control over the training of school principals. Nevertheless, they can help principals acquire the skills necessary to support a positive learning environment. For example, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University has a National School Reform Faculty program composed of teachers and principals in restructuring schools who create Critical Friends Groups. These networks of teachers and principals meet regularly and correspond over the Internet to build a collaborative culture that supports student achievement. The principal groups focus on learning how to be instructional leaders, and use a self-designed protocol to create individual action plans for their own professional development and achievement. Other education organizations are creating standards and guidelines for training principals.

> *The vision and the leadership and the cohesiveness and working together — involving the community, involving the parents — and showing respect for staff, a respect for the kids, a respect for their parents. They seem so elementary, basic. But these things don't always happen.*
>
> — *a San Francisco teacher*

In chronically low-performing schools, improvement can be undermined by staff cynicism, a sense that no one cares, low parental involvement, and concern about the financial costs of making changes. The first task taken on by new leaders working to transform schools is the building of trust and a sense of common mission among school staff and the community. Perhaps one of the hardest parts of the reform process is to put aside defensiveness and get beyond blaming others. Overcoming cynicism is just as central to making things happen. As one school staff member described during a focus group, "It was a team effort…and I mean as far as from the custodian up to the administration. Every person in that school had a place in the mission statement where they committed to the children and what they were going to do to make the difference…it was a really strong team effort."

There are a number of ways districts can help schools build strong and capable school teams:

- *Recruit qualified teachers enthusiastic for change.* Some teachers have seen too many reform efforts come and go to support new initiatives wholeheartedly. To bring new life to its ranks, Chicago recruits and trains teachers in part through Teachers for Chicago, a two-year program sponsored by the Chicago Board of Education, the Chicago teachers' union, and the Golden Apple Foundation in collaboration with Loyola University. Participants desire to enter teaching but often do not have teaching certification. They work towards a Masters in Education while teaching in a Chicago public school. Carter Elementary School, a high-poverty school on Chicago's south side, is benefitting from the enthusiasm of four Teachers for Chicago: a lawyer, a social worker, a graphic artist, and a designer of museum exhibits. The program has recruited more than 500 teachers in Chicago.

  States and districts can do much to work collaboratively with high schools and higher education agencies to help build a qualified teaching force. In 1984, to support a statewide reform agenda, South Carolina's then-Governor Richard Riley established the Teacher Cadet Program to recruit highly qualified young people into teaching. High school juniors and seniors from almost 150 schools in the state have the opportunity to teach younger students. In Cincinnati, the district is working to transform teacher education in partnership with the University of Cincinnati. Prospective teachers obtain degrees in education and from the College of Arts and Sciences and intern at schools where teachers are committed to continuing professional development.

- *Promote buy-in.* School reform cannot work unless the whole school staff is on board. In order to obtain the kind of consensus necessary to support school improvement, teacher contracts in Pittsburgh and Rochester require 60 percent of school faculty to approve school restructuring plans. Organizations such as New American Schools, which help schools to implement comprehensive school reform designs, require a majority of teachers to vote in favor of a model before working with schools.

  Agreements with teachers' unions have increased some districts' capacity to create school environments supportive of change. Some districts allow teachers who are not willing to support reforms to transfer to other schools. In New York City, for example, the district can arrange priority transfers for teachers seeking positions in other schools. The teacher contract in Providence, Rhode Island, grants waivers so that teachers can opt out of newly redesigned schools. In Los Angeles, the teacher contract allows voluntary transfers from schools that are being restructured into charter schools.

- *Create smaller schools.* Some districts have reorganized large schools, particularly high schools, into several schools within one building to help develop a sense of community among school staff and a better learning environment for students. Smaller schools generally have better communication and collaboration among staff; students have a better chance to be known and respected as individuals by adults in the school building. Researchers who have studied high schools note that school size appears to matter most for minority and disadvantaged students: "In schools enrolling large numbers of minority and low-income students, learning falls off sharply as the schools become larger than the ideal." This range is from about 600 to 900 students for high schools.[12]

  Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland, undertook a dramatic structural change to gain control of a chaotic learning environment by establishing five academies, each a small self-contained school-within-a-school. Teacher perceptions of the learning environment have improved dramatically; 83 percent say that teachers are working together better. Student attendance has dramatically increased.[13]

Mobilizing Resources to Support School Improvement

Turning around schools requires tough choices about resource allocation. Creating a true focus on learning in a school may cost jobs and require major shifts in financial resources. Districts and schools must pay attention to how they allocate staff, budgets, materials, and space. As education researcher Allan Odden explains, beyond the basic staffing structure of the principal and classroom teachers, "Traditional schools have additional staff members who, over time, have come to be assumed as necessary to run a school. They are not perceived as organizational fat."[14] Turning around a low-performing school often requires that resources long spent on aides, paraprofessionals, and other specialists, be moved to support a school's instructional focus.

> *The first thing I did when I came to District 13 was to look at student achievement. It was very clear to me that we had to not only raise the ceiling, as they say, but also raise the floor. We had to look at youngsters in all four quartiles and develop a strategy that would allow us to increase achievement across the board. Sometimes that has meant that, as a district office staff, we have been more involved with schools. We look at the personnel needs; at funding — not only the allocation, but how those funds are being used; and at instructional materials and facilities.*
>
> *— Lester W. Young, Community School District 13, New York*

Supporting school change systemwide also should involve streamlining central office administration. Central office staffing and resources must be redesigned and redeployed to support, rather than direct, schools. Districts can help schools build their capacity to change by focusing on learning and better targeting resources toward classrooms and children. For example:

- Part of Philadelphia's education reform plan, called "Children Achieving," is to shrink centralized bureaucracy. By implementing the recommendations of a business coalition, Greater Philadelphia First, the school district saved more than $29 million in two years. The city carried out 56 recommendations that included cutting costs in transportation, food services, and human resources.

Restructuring District Resources

School districts should begin the process by defining instructional goals clearly and analyzing how resources within the district might be better organized to meet them. Spending should be analyzed across areas but four categories in particular might benefit from restructuring:

- ✓ The allocation and assignment of teachers and aides
- ✓ Teacher compensation
- ✓ The organization and provision of student support
- ✓ Spending on general and special program administration

— Karen Hawley Miles, "Rethinking the Use of Teaching Resources"

To the extent that state and district leaders can more efficiently use their own resources, and connect those resources with improved student performance, the more public confidence and trust in school districts and schools will rise.

Business models also can help districts identify and use resources effectively. These models can be especially useful for organizing data about the use of education funds according to program, location, and function. Coopers & Lybrand, a major accounting firm, recently developed a financial analysis tool that provides detailed information on where education dollars go, including how many resources reach the school and how they are used for instruction, professional development, administration, and other functions. Districts in Rhode Island, South Carolina, and several other states are using this model to identify and direct resources for school improvement.

Districts and schools also must examine how they use federal, state and local resources. Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education can serve as a catalyst for fundamental change and comprehensive reform. The largest of these federal programs is Title I, which offers schools and districts flexibility in how they carry out program components. Districts must take the opportunity to explore the way their funds can be used flexibly and in a coordinated way to support teaching and learning for all students.

The inventory of support at the end of this guide lists other resources that state and local leaders can use to craft school improvement plans. All the programs share the goal of increasing flexibility so that districts and schools can use a variety of strategies to raise student achievement, including helping to establish achievement standards, making schools safe and drug-free learning environments, and involving families and communities in children's learning.

Title I Support for Schoolwide Programs

The Department of Education encourages high-poverty schools to use Title I funds to make improvements schoolwide, rather than targeting them only to isolated programs for the lowest performing students. Schoolwide programs allow schools flexibility in coordinating and combining their federal, state, and local funds to support school transformation strategies based on:

- ✓ Effective means of improving student achievement
- ✓ Instructional strategies that increase the amount and quality of learning time, such as extending the school day or year
- ✓ Instruction provided by highly qualified staff
- ✓ High levels of parent involvement

Title I also provides funds for states to establish systems of school support teams, composed of teachers who assist beginning schoolwide programs.

Using Performance Data to Drive Continuous Improvement

Districts can help set the stage for school change by helping schools use data effectively. Measuring progress and setting standards — and analyzing the information to identify patterns of failure and their causes — enables districts and schools to diagnose low performance and attack specific problems with concrete solutions. Important sources of data include: student test scores and portfolios of work; comparisons of schoolwide achievement against district, state, and national standards; and surveys of students, teachers, and parents. For example:

- The Minneapolis school district requires schools to conduct self-audits and adopt yearly improvement plans with extensive help from district staff in interpreting and using assessment data. Using a system called the 20/20 Analysis, which focuses on the performance of students in the 20th and 80th percentiles on the district's assessment, teachers can better use data to develop education plans. As Jeffrey Raison, an elementary school principal who uses the analysis, explained, "We use these data as a temperature gauge to indicate that we might be on the right track [with instruction and other practices]."

- The Maryland Department of Education is piloting a program to help schools pursue data-driven improvements. The state has created a web page to help school teams analyze their students' state assessment data and identify best practices to support improvements in student performance. Maryland presents performance data on a variety of key dimensions in simple graphs for each school. Data are broken out by subject, gender, race, and grade, allowing school teams to compare results to similar schools in the state. The system includes worksheets that ask schools key questions about how their instructional practices influence assessment results, help schools chart questions raised by the data, and allow them to identify further data that they need to collect.

> *Clear data make it possible for a diverse group of individuals to come to consensus. Schools are inherently complex organizations. Each staff is made up of individuals with different personal histories and backgrounds, values and beliefs. Progress occurs when everyone pulls in the same direction...Clear data can enable a school to get commitment to needed change.*
>
> *— Thomas Kelly,*
> *New York Education Department*

- Hueco Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, uses data from the state assessment, attendance records, and parent involvement to set objectives in its campus improvement plan. By analyzing the assessment results, the school was able to target support to students having difficulty understanding word problems on the state assessment. Teachers meet regularly to discuss their students' performance and develop instruction in areas of weakness. The focus on data has helped the school; student achievement and attendance have risen, and no teacher has applied to transfer out of the school in the last three years.

- Penasco Independent Schools in New Mexico sets standards for all district staff to improve student success. The plan specifies what administrators, teachers, and support staff must do to reach the district's targeted goals in many areas, including academic performance, attendance, and parent involvement. The plan also includes benchmarks to help staff assess their progress toward the goals. Student performance on the New Mexico High School Competency Exam and on the portfolio writing assessment has increased over the last three years.
- Other districts have used diagnostic tools such as the National Education Association's Keys to Excellence in Your Schools (KEYS), a self-assessment instrument for schools, to help identify areas of weakness and develop strategies for improving student performance.

Making data-driven decisions for school improvement is critical. The process of matching strategies to school needs is only effective with a detailed understanding of the needs of a particular school and student population. To meet higher expectations and generate local support, schools must document their efforts and refine their strategies as needed. A districtwide emphasis on continuous evaluation helps schools monitor the change process, and assess whether students and schools are achieving goals. Using data to document a school's transformation also helps tell about the challenges and changes made along the way. This process can strengthen morale and give partners a sense of common direction.

Working in Partnership With Parents and Community

Improving relationships between schools and the communities they serve is a vital part of making any kind of lasting change in the learning environment. As states and districts raise accountability for student achievement, all stakeholders across the community must play a role in turning around low-performing schools. Effective districts maximize community resources by developing partnerships with parents, community-based and religious organizations, businesses, universities, and teachers' unions. Stakeholders help define problems and choose solutions only when they actively participate in the process of change.

Parents

Thirty years of research shows that when families and community members are involved in education, students learn more and schools improve. As one Baltimore school principal explains, "Every parent in your building is on your side. That has got to be an accepted premise."

More recent studies show that a school's effort to involve parents is the single most important factor in determining parental involvement.[15] Strategies for family involvement go beyond simply inviting parents to conferences or sending home with students information about what the school is doing. Policymakers need to involve parents integrally in what schools do. They need to include parents when schools set goals and choose improvement strategies. Districts need to encourage schools to make it easier for parents to be informed and to play a part in what goes on in the classroom. New technologies such as school voice mail systems, homework hot lines, and the Internet can serve as vehicles for staying connected with families. Schools also need to accommodate parents who do not understand English. In short, they need to ensure that teachers learn how to work with families.

> *The old dogma used to be the teachers did their thing and parents did their thing, and the two didn't meet. Well, now it's something that's overtly expressed, that you make a difference in your child's education if you are a part of it. And that is something that we preach over and over...it's the parent and the child and the teacher. It's the three that make the difference.*
>
> *— Baltimore parent in a focus group*

- A sense of commitment and family became the key to revitalizing Clara Barton Community School in the Bronx, a school where shrinking enrollment threatened closure. In 1986, a leadership committee formed to engage the entire community in the life of the school, and the New York City Board of Education gave the school an improvement grant to further the reform process. The school focused on providing for the needs of the "entire student." To meet those needs, school staff developed close relationships with individuals and institutions in the community. These relationships helped the school bring in additional resources, materials, and knowledge. Today, an entrepreneurial spirit pervades Clara Barton Community School. Administrators, parents, and staff all work together to secure grants, partnerships, and funds for the school. The efforts have paid off for student achievement. In 1996, 95 percent of third-graders and 87 percent of sixth-graders scored above the state's minimum standards in math, and 82 percent of fifth-grade students scored above the state's minimum requirement for writing. Clara Barton Community School has twice been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education for its Chapter 1/Title I program.

Community-Based Organizations

Policy makers need to think beyond the usual range of partners to increase the assistance and resources available to help children learn in their communities. Local organizations often prove to be valuable resources to schools. For example:

- In rural Early County in southwest Georgia, the Boys and Girls Club of Albany runs a delinquency prevention program that offers a school-based after-school and summer enrichment program for at-risk youth. The program provides tutoring and homework assistance, violence and substance abuse prevention services, career counseling and job readiness training, athletic and cultural activities, and mental health counseling for participants and their families. Other community organizations and the city and county have contributed resources.

Community-based organizations can often serve as umbrella groups to engage all community stakeholders in education improvement. For example:

- When Texas' accountability system was put into place, three districts (El Paso, Ysleta, and Socorro) banded together to create the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence. The collaborative, which encompasses 167 schools and 135,000 students, brings together district, university, business, political and religious leaders to improve schools. The goal of the collaborative is to prepare each graduating student to go on to a four-year college. The organization helps provide professional development to central office staff and mentors to teachers. It sponsors subject matter institutes for teachers and helps them bring standards into the classroom. Student performance is improving; the three districts are enrolling more students in challenging math courses, no schools are on the state's low-performing list, and 41 schools are on Texas' "recognized" list for student achievement.

Business Partnerships

Business partners can provide volunteer tutors, internships for students, and specialized expertise that most schools do not have, especially in the areas of professional development and organizational management. Businesses also can reward students directly for achieving high standards and help ensure that what students learn in school prepares them for work. Many businesses participate in small, adopt-a-school type partnerships with schools in their communities. Some corporations have made commitments to improving public education on a larger scale:

- The New Boston Compact is an educational reform effort involving a citywide collaboration between the public school system, John Hancock Financial Services, and other stakeholders to increase student access to higher education, improve curriculum, provide training and professional development, and support families.

- Breakthrough for Learning, a public-private venture that includes the New York City Board of Education, the New York City Partnership, and the Chamber of Commerce, links staff compensation to performance, and offers incentives for success. In this initiative, superintendents, principals, teachers, and schools earn financial rewards for meeting performance improvement targets.

- In 1989, Tenneco, a Texas-based business, formed a partnership with the Houston Independent School District to increase the number of students graduating from high school. The company began by providing $1,000 a year in college scholarships to graduates of one Houston school. Now known as Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), the expanded program involves many other schools in the district and includes other partners such as the Ford Foundation, Cullin Foundation, El Paso Energy, and GTE. The program provides curricula, professional development, and dropout prevention services to elementary, middle, and high schools.

- IBM's Reinventing Education initiative is providing $35 million to 16 school districts and 6 states to develop new applications of technology that will overcome barriers to school improvement and help students achieve high standards. New technologies under development aim to increase parent involvement, improve professional development, enhance instruction in early literacy and in middle school math and science, and improve the quality and timeliness of data for school-based decision making.

Colleges and Universities

Area colleges and universities can play a vital role in helping to improve low-performing schools; they can help create curricula, oversee business management, provide professional development to teachers and administrators, provide student mentors and tutors, and be an integral part of a school reform strategy. For example:

- In Chicago, higher education institutions including DePaul University, Malcolm X College, University of Illinois at Chicago, Roosevelt University, and Northeastern Illinois University, are among the approved external partners that schools on probation can call on to help implement a school improvement plan.

- Teach Baltimore is a summer academic program founded in 1992 by a student at Johns Hopkins University through the university's Office of Volunteer Services. Teach Baltimore recruits and trains college students from across the city to teach a full-time, eight-week, structured, intensive academic program to students in small classroom settings. This summer, tutors for Teach Baltimore will work with students in three high-poverty, low-performing elementary schools and one high school. The program is expanding to partner with the university's Division of Education and the city's personnel office to provide summer tutors with a professional development program that would allow them to earn their teacher certification and a master's degree while teaching in the Baltimore school system.

In addition to local efforts, many top universities have developed school improvement programs that have been replicated nationwide. For example:

- The School Development Plan, created by James Comer at Yale University, operates in over 600 schools. The program, based on the idea that it takes active involvement of all members of the school community to help children succeed, seeks to create learning environments supportive of the multiple aspects of child development and is dedicated to principles of consensus and collaboration in school governance.

- Accelerated Schools, developed at Stanford University, is committed to the idea that all children can learn and that rather than remediation, schools need to accelerate learning for at-risk students in order to improve student achievement.

- The Coalition of Essential Schools, developed at Brown University, is a network of over 1,000 schools that are focused on students' demonstration of their mastery of essential skills. The schools use the metaphor of teachers as "coaches" and students as "workers" as part of the organizing philosophy.

Teachers' Unions

The entire school community must commit to transformation efforts if schools are to improve student achievement. Teachers' unions can be powerful allies in developing such commitment. Districts need to work in tandem with teachers and unions in selecting improvement goals and strategies.

> *Teachers' unions, by and large, have not done enough to protest these failures. We do a great job protecting our members from these dysfunctional school systems. But we can and must do more to protect children, who are the real victims.*
>
> *— Bob Chase, President of the National Education Association*

Working in partnership, teachers' unions and districts have created districtwide plans to redesign low-performing schools, help dissatisfied teachers leave the system, and train or counsel inadequate teachers out of the profession. In Corpus Christi, Texas, the teachers' union teamed up with the district to design "Real World Academic Standards." The team also created student assessments, provided tutoring, eliminated social promotion, and established discipline codes for the district.[16]

While much of what must change in low-performing schools is the interaction between teachers and students, partnerships remain important. They signal an understanding that education requires a shared commitment that includes stakeholders from outside of the school.

Working in Partnership with Teachers' Unions to Improve Schools

Pressure for accountability and professionalism is forging new partnerships between district administrators and teachers' unions. Public education is only as strong as its weakest school, and teachers' unions increasingly are working with school communities to improve student learning.

As Sandra Feldman, President of the American Federation of Teachers explains, "There is no question that some of our schools are failing. Any school that is not good enough for our own children should be targeted for immediate improvement. We must — and can — educate all children by turning around schools that are disorderly and unsafe and where kids are not learning. Close them if necessary; rethink everything about them. And do it fast."

In New York City and Toledo, for example, local teachers' union representatives are active on the review and intervention teams that evaluate schools and mandate corrective actions to improve teaching and learning in low-performing schools. In Minneapolis, the school district and the teachers' union are collaborating to develop effective intervention strategies in low-performing schools. The program, called "Fresh Start," will include strategies to close failing schools and start over.

Stimulating Innovation and Change

When it comes to building leadership and capacity for change, districts can learn from the experiences of high-performance organizations. When these successful organizations are faced with pressures to meet higher standards, they "set clear performance goals at the top; flatten the organizational structure; decentralize power and authority into the hands of work teams; involve employees in making key decisions about how to organize and conduct their work; and hold employees accountable for results."[17]

Districts can help stimulate innovation and change by providing incentives for school performance, and supporting school-based management and decision making. Districts also can implement policies that allow parents to choose the public schools their children will attend, and support the development of public charter schools.

Providing Incentives for High Performance

Districts can stimulate change by providing positive incentives for improved student performance and rewarding school progress. For example:

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Benchmark Goals program gives cash awards of $750 to $1,000 to teachers in schools whose students meet a range of goals that reflect improvements over previous performance. The goals are structured so that schools have an incentive to raise the achievement of their lowest performing students. The program also focuses on goals for African-American students, who historically have been under-achievers in the Charlotte school system, thus ensuring that schools work to close the achievement gap between African-American and white students.

- Boston has established a special fund to distribute extra money to schools that show the greatest increases in performance. In San Antonio, Texas, teachers can earn bonuses tied to district performance goals.

Public School Choice and Open Enrollment

Eighteen states have open enrollment policies for public school districts, and districts in eleven other states have such programs where there is no statewide policy. Such policies can serve as incentives for improving low-performing schools.[18]

- In Boston, all parents choose their child's public school from a wide array of options including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, and pilot and public charter schools.

Public School Choice: Samuel Mason Elementary School
Boston, Massachusetts

When Boston implemented public school choice in 1990, Mason Elementary School was the least chosen school in the system. It had an enrollment of only 133 students. The school took on a "consumer" approach — looking for ways to improve so that parents and children would find it attractive and choose it. The school moved from instruction based on remediation to accelerated learning for all students, developing innovative programs that came from team planning, problem solving based on data, and a process of continuous learning through professional development. By 1996, Mason Elementary School was ranked in the top third of all Boston Public Schools in math and reading, and was nationally recognized as a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education.

- The Houston Independent School District recently instituted an open choice program. Parents may send their children to any of the district's 258 schools provided the school is not at more than 95 percent capacity. Parents apply to the district transfer office to change their children's schools. In addition to this choice program, the district has launched an aggressive effort to support in-district charter schools.

Choice options include more than districtwide open enrollment policies. In an effort to create more personal learning communities for high school students, the "schools within a school" concept offers students in a large school building choices about their educational focus. Career academies operate with a curriculum that integrates academics and occupations, and offer internships in the local community.[19] For instance, the Academy of Finance at Lake Clifton-Eastern High School in Baltimore is a magnet program. In addition to taking finance-related classes, high school students with adequate attendance and achievement records in the Academy intern with employers in the financial service industry.

Charter Schools

Public charter schools are created through performance contracts among local educators, parents, community members, and/or school boards. They are exempted from a variety of state and local regulations in exchange for committing to improving student performance. There are now over 750 public charter schools in the United States that create constructive competition within the public school system. While independence with accountability allows charter schools to be unique learning centers for children, it is what charter schools have in common with other schools that can expand their impact on public schools generally. By maintaining open enrollment policies, operating with the resources available to traditional public schools, remaining accountable to public bodies, and maintaining a non-sectarian and free status, charter schools serve as models for other public schools.

Public Charter Schools: Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
Los Angeles, California

At Vaughn, a large public charter school in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 99 percent of students come from families living below the federal poverty line. Until 1991, the school was one of the worst in Los Angeles, with single-digit test scores, poor school-community relations, overcrowding, health problems, and drug abuse. But under the leadership of a new principal, the staff — who were tired of feeling they worked "in a throw-away school" — cleaned up the school, implemented school-based management, reallocated funds to cover support services, applied for numerous grants, trained staff, and reached out to parents. In 1993, Vaughn became the first independent public charter school in its district. The school based its change on three principles: (1) putting children first; (2) unleashing human resources; and (3) dreaming big, planning long-term, and thinking positively. Turn-around strategies included providing comprehensive school-based health services, early intervention counseling, an extended school year, and after-school and weekend programs. Scores on the California Test of Basic Skills improved dramatically.

Charter schools focus on high expectations and high performance, and some target their efforts specifically toward at-risk children. In 1997, Denver opened its first charter school, the Pioneer Charter School, which gives priority to students from economically disadvantaged communities and serves as an incubator for practices that support high achievement for urban students. The school features a personalized instruction plan for each student, a year-round calendar, an extended-day schedule, and access to health care, education, and social services for students and their families. It operates as a joint effort of the school district and the University of Denver.

These districtwide strategies can provide an impetus for school improvement by introducing flexibility, choice, and incentives into the public school system. While these system-level changes can help turn around some schools, more direct intervention in persistently low-performing schools may be necessary.

As this guide illustrates, states and districts must play a role in creating the capacity, vision, and commitment needed to improve their lowest performing schools. Holding schools accountable for performance is not enough. Low-performing schools usually have limited capacity, on their own, to make the kinds of changes necessary to focus on learning and improve student achievement. Often, intervention is necessary.

Twenty-three states have policies for intervening and mandating major changes in low-performing schools, and 17 states grant this authority at the district level.[20] In many cases, states or districts provide technical assistance and additional resources to help redesign or restructure chronically low-performing schools. In some jurisdictions, schools have been reconstituted — which often involves replacing school principals and removing school teachers and staff.

Collaborative Efforts to Redesign Low-Performing Schools

Many states and districts recognize that low-performing schools cannot go it alone. Chronically low-performing schools need support and technical assistance to develop improvement strategies. A number of districts have intervened in a collaborative process involving all stakeholders — including parents, teachers, administrators, and unions — to redesign low-performing schools:

- The Miami-Dade County Public School System, in partnership with the United Teachers of Dade, intervenes in critically low-performing schools through a plan called "Operation Safety Net." Chronically low-performing schools are asked to implement a schoolwide reading program and are given improved technology. The district provides the technical assistance and resources to help create the support structures necessary for the schools to turn around.

- New York City created the Chancellor's District to provide low-performing schools with more prescriptive and directed assistance. Persistently low-performing schools in the city needed a centralized educational and administrative mechanism to set instructional priorities, identify professional development needs, and oversee progress. The schools receive special intervention and technical assistance until the district determines that they have the capacity and commitment to support the redesign plan that the district helped create.

  Leaders in the Chancellor's District in New York City understand that improvement requires that the entire school-community be involved in the change process. Thus, the Chancellor's District makes a concerted effort to collaborate with parents, community organizations, colleges, and teachers' unions. As part of the state's Registration Review Process, a group representing these stakeholders evaluates the conditions in low-performing schools and helps the schools develop a redesign plan. The execution of the plan is carefully monitored by a State Education Department staff person who maintains contact with the school and provides on-going support and technical assistance.

New York State: The Registration Review Process

New York State has developed a process to help low-performing schools devise and implement ways to improve the academic performance of students. A team of teachers, board of education members, union representatives, parents, and curriculum and education experts, led by a district superintendent, conducts a four-day review visit of each low-performing school. The review includes examination of the school's instruction, curriculum, assessment, management, leadership, professional development, parent and family involvement, discipline and safety, physical facilities, and the adequacy of district support for the school. It also mandates that each low-performing school study its own characteristics and practices. The school district then develops a corrective action plan based on the review team's findings. As a result of the program, more than 30 schools have been redesigned by school districts in the state. The review process includes interviews with everyone from the principal to the custodial staff at the school and includes the following questions that help reviewers to identify characteristics of effective school programs:

- ✓ Is there a written school philosophy for instruction that reflects current research and the needs of the students?
- ✓ Is there a common understanding of goals and objectives?
- ✓ Is the program consistent and coordinated across grade levels?
- ✓ Is there an appropriate amount of time allocated to instruction?
- ✓ Is there a schoolwide approach to the teaching of subject matter?
- ✓ Is there ongoing, systematic staff development on subject matter?
- ✓ Are teachers made aware of current research? Are they encouraged to attend professional conferences?
- ✓ Is there an achievement record for each student that reflects standardized tests, individual assessments, and the identification of strengths and needs passed on yearly from teacher to teacher?
- ✓ Is there a systematic approach to the use of test data to diagnose student needs?
- ✓ Are students with similar needs grouped for instruction with flexibility as needs change?
- ✓ Is there a written, consistently applied homework policy?
- ✓ Do parents have a meaningful role in the program that contributes to the development of their children's skills?

- In Kentucky, low-performing schools are assigned "distinguished educators" from other districts to assist in reform efforts. Schools that continue to drop far behind expectations are assigned state managers who evaluate all school personnel and make recommendations and changes to improve school performance. Of the 53 schools originally assigned distinguished educators in 1994, 36 have improved enough to leave the program.[21]

- In Chicago, low-performing schools placed on probation are required to submit a corrective action plan to the district that is used to evaluate the school's progress. Schools are given the opportunity to choose from a selection of 20 external partners, paid by the district to assist the school in turning around student performance. Recognizing that principals often are overwhelmed by administrative issues, the district assigns a school operation manager or business manager intern to deal with fiscal and administrative issues so that the principal can focus on instructional issues. Schools that begin to raise student achievement and are on the right track are identified as "emerging" schools. Schools that fail to improve can be subject to reconstitution.

Other states and districts are taking steps to improve low-performing schools with positive interventions. Maryland sponsors partnerships between the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools and low-performing schools in the state. Michigan helps low-performing schools by providing evaluation services, designing district-level support plans, and helping schools align their curriculum with state assessments.

Providing low-performing schools with technical assistance and support for improvement is an important part of state and local accountability measures. Chronically low-performing schools usually have little capacity to turn themselves around. In order for these schools to be held accountable for results, states and districts must intervene to help them focus on learning, and align resources, professional development, and other aspects of school operations with that focus. While this can be done, in part, by setting district policies to meet that priority, chronically low-performing schools often require the kind of assistance that can only come from external intervention.

> *If schools don't work for children, school leaders must act decisively. I am pleased that so many low-performing schools have been able to turn around and increase significantly the percentage of their students who are meeting state standards. Much more still needs to be done.*
>
> *— Richard P. Mills, New York State Commissioner of Education*

Accountability and Improvement: Kentucky's STAR Program
Livingston Central High School, Smithland, Kentucky

Teacher empowerment, backed by an infusion of state funding, was the key to transforming Livingston Central High School in Smithland, Kentucky—a small, rural, low-income school in the western part of the state.

In spring 1993, the staff at Livingston Central was informed that student scores on tests mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) had dropped significantly from baseline scores established over the two preceding years. The labeling of the school's academic programs as "in decline" and then "in crisis" triggered the school's entry into the School Transformation Assistance and Renewal (STAR) program.

STAR schools are eligible for substantial state financial assistance, but this assistance is extended only after the schools develop data-driven action plans guided by a "distinguished educator" assigned from outside the district. Ann Brown, the educator assigned to Livingston Central and veteran of many STAR assignments, says the faculty was open to change from the start.

The staff set up planning teams formed around every cognitive subject area. The teams were led by teachers but included parents, students, and others. The teams focused on applied learning activities across the curriculum. The STAR budget funded previously unaffordable technology—computers and other tools like graphing calculators. Teachers were encouraged to try to find other sources of support in the community, and a local firm made its computers available for student use until a school computer lab opened.

Livingston Central's *process* of school transformation was as important as any specific activity. "The most dramatic change," recalls Debbie DeWeese, then a teacher and now Livingston Central's dean of students, "was that it gave everyone a voice in the operation of the school. There was a personal buy-in. It really turned our faculty into a team."

The planning teams gave high priority to professional development for the use of STAR funds. Teachers attended seminars and workshops outside Smithland to learn new ideas by networking with their professional peers. The most stressful part of the process for the staff was a built-in self-evaluation—a monthly narrative report called "Vital Signs."

Ultimately, the turnaround was spectacular. At the next testing period, students' test scores moved the school from "decline" to "reward" status. "The major difference in our school today," says DeWeese, "is the team effort for improvement. The STAR process is extremely stressful, but it was good for us. We don't *have* to do it anymore, but we still operate our school this way."

School Reconstitution: A Strategy of Last Resort

In some situations, the problems in a school may be so entrenched or so extreme that none of the intervention strategies discussed above produces the necessary improvement. According to district administrators in Houston, Rusk Elementary School presented such a case in 1993. The problem went well beyond low achievement: a state accreditation team described the atmosphere as "so poisonous the teachers couldn't teach and the pupils couldn't learn." Responding to complaints, district officials decided to "reconstitute" Rusk, removing faculty and staff and starting over with a new administration, almost all new faculty, and a new educational vision. Within a year, observers were lauding the improvement.

States with Power to Reconstitute Schools or Districts [22]

State	Years on Probation or Warning Before Reconstitution	State Assistance Offered	State	Years on Probation or Warning Before Reconstitution	State Assistance Offered
Alabama	3	✔	New Jersey	varies	✔
Arizona	2	✔	New Mexico	varies	✔
Connecticut		✔	New York	3	✔
Florida	3	✔	North Carolina	varies	✔
Illinois	4		Ohio	90 days	✔
Iowa	varies	✔	Oklahoma	six months	✔
Kentucky	2-3	✔	South Carolina	2	✔
Maryland	varies		Tennessee	2	
Massachusetts	2	✔	Texas	2	✔
Michigan	3	✔	Virginia		
Mississippi	varies		West Virginia	1.3	✔
Missouri	2				

An isolated example in Houston at the time, reconstitution had previously been implemented in other districts (e.g., San Francisco had reconstituted four schools in 1984 as part of a desegregation consent decree) and has since been incorporated into school accountability processes in a growing number of districts and states. For example:

- In the summer of 1997, Chicago reconstituted seven high schools that had previously been on probation for low performance.

- Maryland identified 38 new schools as "reconstitution eligible" in January 1998, in addition to 52 schools named the previous year.

- Since the Comprehensive School Improvement Program (CSIP) was instituted in 1993, ten schools have been added to those previously reconstituted in San Francisco.

Despite its growing use, the term "reconstitution" lacks a precise common meaning. It has been used to describe intervention strategies that range from the restructuring of school leadership, mandated redesign of a school's program and instructional practices, to state takeover of school governance. In its most extreme form, reconstitution involves disbanding the existing faculty and replacing nearly all the school staff. This approach to reconstitution has garnered the most attention and engendered the greatest controversy.

School Reconstitution: Visitacion Valley Middle School
San Francisco, California

In spring 1994, the San Francisco Unified School District reconstituted Visitacion Valley Middle School because of low performance on several measures of achievement. The district hired a new principal, Dr. John Flores, and required teachers to reapply for their jobs. Applicants for positions in the reconstituted school received a written list of 15 expectations Flores had for his staff, along with the following frank statement:

"If you have reservations about team teaching or thematic instruction; if you prefer to teach your subject separately, to set your own rules and procedures which differ from building agreements, to set standards for class groups rather than expectations for individuals, to focus on teacher-directed activities rather than to facilitate student-oriented, hands-on lessons; if you prefer the status quo to continuous growth and improvement; if you are looking for a teaching position with little or no expectation for your commitment outside of the school day, you may want to look for a position elsewhere."

Principal Flores went on to explain that while no one can meet such expectations all of the time, he was asking teachers to strive toward these expectations and that in return, he would give them whatever support they needed in staff development, discipline, and parent relations, and would invite all to participate in decisions that affect the school. The new school staff redesigned the school's structure and program. The staff began by drafting a mission statement that included commitments to maintaining a safe atmosphere and to providing services that foster children's educational development.

Proponents believe that the threat of reconstitution can help to motivate improvement throughout school systems, particularly in low-performing or probationary schools. As one Maryland principal explains, the threat of reconstitution at his school was "an opportunity for leveraging change and [using] the accountability issue in a positive way to motivate teachers and to give us an excuse to do things differently...to empower us." Supporters point to improvement in probationary schools as evidence of the motivating impact of reconstitution.

Other observers consider the threat of reconstitution a faulty strategy that blames teachers for school failure while doing little to solve the underlying problems that contribute to low performance. By this account, school reconstitution has the potential to *diminish* morale in schools that are already weakened communities. Teachers in one San Francisco high school, for example, called the threat of reconstitution a "degrading process" that has "sent morale down the tubes."

Intervention Strategies: Lessons and Considerations

Early findings from research on reconstitution in several jurisdictions suggest that state and district leaders should consider the following factors when deciding to pursue reconstitution as a last resort intervention in failing schools:

- *To date, there are no conclusive data demonstrating that the threat of reconstitution is an effective motivator for change.* Anecdotal evidence indicates that the overall impact of reconstitution on motivation may be either positive or negative depending upon the circumstances. Research on motivation as well as interviews with teachers and other stakeholders suggest that it may be particularly important to establish a process and solutions deemed legitimate by the stakeholders. Involving the stakeholders in the decision process may be one way of establishing that legitimacy, as occurred in Denver with the inclusion of the teachers union in the decision to reconstitute two elementary schools in 1996. Another approach may be to create a very different kind of school after reconstitution, such as breaking up a large high school into several much smaller alternative schools, or reconfiguring several schools within a neighborhood, as occurred in the first phase of reconstitution in San Francisco in 1984. In this way, the change in staff is only one part of more far reaching attempts to redefine the educational opportunities and structures offered to a community.

- *To successfully reconstitute (literally to "re-build") a failed school requires overcoming a legacy of failure that developed over a long period and that may persist after reconstitution.* Simply replacing the adults in a troubled school building will not lead to a turnaround. By the time reconstitution becomes necessary, patterns of failure — low expectations, poor community relations, deteriorating physical plant, and general demoralization — have often become entrenched, not only among staff but among parents, community members, and students as well.

Results from the study of reconstituted schools suggest several lessons that are important for state and local leaders to consider for *any intervention strategy* in low-performing schools:

- *Strong leadership at the school site is essential.* Consistent with the literature on effective school organizations, San Francisco (which has the longest and most extensive experience with school reconstitution) has found the school principal to be a pivotal individual in determining the success of reconstituted schools. When reconstitution involves a substantial change in faculty, it is the principal who must select the new staff, and with that staff, set a new direction for the school. Where leadership in the reconstituted school has been weak or unstable, progress is elusive. District officials and teachers in San Francisco suggest that individuals chosen to lead reconstituted schools must bring with them a strong track record of previous principalships and a working knowledge of the district and its operations. Moreover, even experienced principals require support and assistance; both San Francisco and Chicago have instituted regular meetings of principals in reconstituted schools to help provide that support.

- *Successful rebuilding of a low-performing school appears to require a very clear break with past practices at that site.* This break may take a structural form, such as the replacement of a large school by several smaller ones or the establishment of a new magnet school organized around a particular theme. Where the establishment of a completely new organization is not feasible, other ways of signaling the change for the community may be necessary.

- *High expectations and collective responsibility for student learning must be at the heart of the rebuilding effort.* Substantial improvements in student learning require ongoing and collective attention to removing the underlying systemic problems contributing to low performance: low expectations, inadequate curriculum, and poor or inappropriate instruction. This means that curriculum and instruction must be the center of any rebuilding effort.

- *Professional development and capacity-building are key to success.* Attention to teacher learning is particularly important in reconstituted schools. Veteran educators in schools need to rethink what they have been doing and learn new approaches. At the same time, the staff in reconstituted schools tend to be younger and less experienced than in other schools, which also points to the need for professional development.

- *Beware of the unintended consequences.* It is important to consider the long-term and unintended consequences of reconstitution policies and practices. For example, reassignment policies and recruitment strategies can have a significant impact not only on reconstituted schools but on other schools in the district as well. Too much movement of staff may have a destabilizing and demoralizing effect on the district as a whole. Inadequate time for recruitment and preparation of new staff can jeopardize any potential gains from reconstitution. When the pool of prospective teachers is small or when inadequate attention is paid to recruitment, reconstituted schools may be almost entirely staffed by brand new teachers.

- *The role of the district and state leadership is pivotal in determining the success of reconstituted schools.* As should be evident from the examples in this guide, the process of improving low-performing schools is as much the responsibility of the state and district administration as of the individual schools.

States and districts can do much to foster success through the design of reconstitution criteria and processes, the provision of material and human resources, and the establishment of a climate of support and leadership. The greatest contribution states and districts can make is in the creation of a system in which school reconstitution is unnecessary because low performance and the problems that cause it are addressed quickly and effectively.

Conclusion

There are many ways to improve low-performing schools but no simple solutions. Making changes to improve student performance can be a painful process for schools. Strong leadership, staff commitment, and a fundamental belief that all children can learn are necessary conditions for turning around low-performing schools. Even then, the task remains great. A history of failure and low expectations can lessen the ability of low-performing schools to even hope to improve.

Schools must focus, get control of the school environment, and put in place rigorous curriculum and instructional practices. In order for schools to be able to do this, education leaders on the state and local levels must support changes that will create and sustain a supportive environment for learning. School reform cannot take place outside the context of such support. As this guide has demonstrated, state and local leaders can play crucial roles in creating an environment that supports school improvement by:

- Promoting *challenging standards* for students, teachers, and school leaders;
- Establishing *accountability* systems that provide schools with explicit goals for increasing student achievement and ending social promotion, incentives to take on challenging reforms, and consequences for persistent low performance;
- Supporting *strong leaders* who can help take teachers through the sometimes painful process of school reform, foster collaboration, and strengthen parent and community involvement in schools;
- Giving schools the *tools and information* they need to assess school needs, choose turnaround strategies, agree on coordinated instructional practices, and monitor performance to create a cycle of continuous improvement;
- Allocating *resources* in such a way to support ongoing and instruction-focused professional development, assistance to students who need extra academic help, school readiness, and comprehensive school reform strategies;
- Supporting *districtwide transformation* through strategies such as charter schools and public school choice.

The task of fixing failing schools is not easy, but the alternative is unacceptable. As we enter a new millennium, it is time for America to renew its commitment to future generations — to raise our expectations for all children, to refuse to accept failure, and to work together to strengthen our schools so that *every* child can strive toward high levels of achievement and learning.

Checklist for Improvement

The following suggestions, based on research and the experiences of successful turnaround schools, are relevant for various partners working together to ensure that all students attend high-performing schools:

Suggestions for State and Local Leaders

1. Give school officials sufficient authority to act quickly, decisively, and creatively to improve schools—and then hold them accountable for results.

2. Support schools that are working to fundamentally change and improve. Consider instituting a reward system for schools that improve performance. Give them extra resources, support, recognition, and assistance whenever possible.

3. Take extra steps to recruit, support, reward, and train outstanding principals and teachers and send them to schools in difficulty. Use experienced, recognized teachers as mentors to beginning teachers.

4. Provide quick but fair ways to take bold action to address chronically troubled schools. Provide concrete means to convert a school to a new design, reconstitute it, or start it over as a charter school.

5. Establish a state or districtwide data collection system that allows the evaluation of student and school progress across a set of expected standards of performance.

6. Evaluate student performance to make sure that *all* students are making progress toward high standards of excellence and are given opportunities to succeed. Then end social promotion. At the same time, recognize that school transformation is an ongoing process and results do not always appear immediately.

7. Give parents the opportunity to choose among public schools and choose the full set of core courses needed for their children to prepare for college and careers.

8. Consider creating a more personalized education setting in high schools by establishing smaller units, such as grade-level or across-grade "families," several charter schools, schools within a school, or career academies.

9. **Ensure that no student or group of students is left out of improvement efforts.** Disadvantaged students need extra attention to make sure they are receiving the same opportunities as other children. This requires focused, high-quality instruction during the regular school day and extra help and time after school and during the summer.

10. **Work with employers, teachers, principals, and religious and community groups to encourage greater family and community involvement** in the school, after school, in the community, and at home.

11. **If a principal is slow to get the message, find strength in a new leader with experience in similar schools.**

12. **If teachers are burned out or not engaged in the needed improvements, counsel them to improve or leave the profession.** Create mechanisms to allow those who do not agree with the reform to leave.

Suggestions for School Leaders — Principals, Lead Teachers, and Parent Leaders

1. **Create an orderly, disciplined environment.** Students will do well and teachers will improve their teaching if they are in a safe, supportive culture of learning with firm, fair rules of discipline.

2. **Recruit and hire the best teachers and principals.** Provide high-quality professional development to keep them at your school and continuously improve their knowledge and skills.

3. **Be open to fundamental change.** Build a team with a relentless focus on improving instruction and achieving high academic standards. Go the extra mile—school leaders set the tone for the whole school.

4. **Identify needs based on achievement results and group input.** Analyze student achievement results at the student and classroom level. Examine the school's budget, looking for what percent of resources is dedicated to improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

5. **Search out and visit research-based designs as a guide to choosing reforms.** Send teachers to conferences, training, and other schools to consider proven designs. Successful designs or models have been used in schools across the country. A number of these designs can be adapted to your school's needs. The whole school community should agree on the design for your school.

6. **Work with top district administrators and staff as well as teachers, parents, and school staff to set concrete goals tied to high standards for student and school achievement.** Choose an improvement strategy that targets the student needs revealed by your data analysis. Make the goals real by continuously monitoring progress toward them. If progress is slow or nonexistent, reassess what needs to improve in the school and make the necessary changes.

7. **Concentrate professional development on improving teaching.** Focus professional development on enhancing teachers' knowledge of their subject matter and their skills for engaging students in learning. Allow teachers to identify professional development needs for the school, and include time for professional development in the regular school schedule; staff development is not an extra-curricular activity.

8. **Reach out to parents and family members.** Listen to parents' concerns to find out what worries them most for their children. Train teachers and other school staff to work with families. Use new technologies—voice mail systems, homework hot lines, and the Internet—to link parents to the classroom. Make special accommodations to

reach parents whose first language is not English. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *New Skills for New Schools*, a text on how to help teachers involve families in children's learning.

9. **Include all staff in the process of change; create a team.** School improvements will work only if teachers commit to fundamental change. Everyone—including administrative, custodial, and other school staff—can help create a positive learning environment. Call a meeting of teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and other partners to establish a focus for improvement.

10. **Make collaborative planning time available.** Incorporate into the regular schedule time for teachers to plan, discuss, and set goals together.

11. **Plan instructional time to meet student needs.** Many schools have increased family support and education by offering safe havens for students before and after school, providing learning and enrichment programs for children that build on their regular school program, offering course work and social activities for adults in the evenings and on weekends, and instituting block scheduling. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *Keeping Schools Open As Community Learning Centers*.

12. **Develop partnerships with businesses, civic groups, and institutions of higher education.** These connections can provide monetary and material resources, volunteer time, and expertise about school reform and education research.

13. **Reach out for assistance.** Look in the resource directory at the end of this guide for information on resources that can help turn around schools. Contact one of the many experienced organizations that are also listed in this guide. Explore research-based approaches to see if they meet your school's needs. Ask other schools working on reforms nearby for assistance and advice. Bring in a facilitator to help assess your needs and identify academic areas in greatest need of improvement.

14. **Learn about charter schools and school reconstitution.** Invite successful charter school developers to explain how they got organized and started. Visit the website devoted to charter schools, <http://www.uscharterschools.org>. Some schools have to start completely over to have a chance at success.

15. **Continuously assess progress toward goals by including evaluation in your school improvement plan.** This will give positive reinforcement to students, staff, and the community by showing how far the school has come. It will also illuminate areas needing greater attention. Continuous evaluation provides an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the change process and make suggestions about ways to refine and improve it. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a copy of *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*.

Suggestions for Families, Businesses, and Community Organizations

1. **Get involved with the school.** Support needed changes and improvements. Make your voice heard. Work with the principal and teachers to make the school the best learning environment for children. If order and discipline need to be instilled, help by reinforcing school rules at home. Volunteer to monitor school halls and playgrounds.

2. **Compare your school with similar schools that are successful.** There is much to learn from a partnership with schools that are being turned around or have an accelerated rate of improvement.

3. **Support your principal and teachers and other staff who are making fundamental changes to turn your school around.** Principals and teachers need encouragement from parents and the community to know they are heading in the right direction.

4. **Encourage schools to help *all* children reach high standards for learning.** If you see that some children are not being challenged, talk to their teachers, the principal, or the district staff. The curriculum, student assessments, teaching, and homework should all be focused on high academic standards.

5. **Instill in children the values they need to progress in school and throughout life.** Work to build good character and citizenship skills to help improve school discipline and student achievement. Many children need extra help, including tutoring and mentoring after school and during the summer. Help start and expand after-school programs to provide a safe environment (e.g., bring in and join other community and youth groups).

6. **Demonstrate that education is important.** If you are a parent, ask to see your child's homework and take an active interest in what he or she is learning at school. If you represent a business, ask to see students' transcripts before you hire them. If you represent a community organization, recognize students who reach high achievement levels and reward teachers and principals who go the extra mile. Develop school-college partnerships to link middle school and high school students with college.

7. **Offer professional development opportunities for teachers through summer internships in businesses that focus on their subject matter.** Technical firms can offer placement in work that hones teachers' math and science knowledge. Businesses and colleges can help with team building and strategic planning.

8. **Become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.** Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for a free information packet on how to join 4,000 family, school, community, cultural, and religious organizations and businesses that are committed to increasing family and community involvement in education.

Proposed Initiatives

Educational Opportunity Zones. Funding under this proposed program would help urban and rural school districts with high concentrations of children from low-income families to expand the scope and accelerate the pace of the educational reforms they have already begun to implement. Districts would need to show that they are implementing policies that support improvement and accountability for student performance, such as those outlined in this guide.

Reducing Class Size. President Clinton has proposed to help reduce class size nationally to an average of 18 students per class in the early elementary grades by providing new funding to recruit and train tens of thousands of new teachers. Research shows that students, especially in the early grades, learn significantly better when they receive more individualized attention in smaller classes. Improving education in the early years can help the most disadvantaged students read well in elementary school and get on the right track to achieve in middle and high school.

School Modernization. New incentives have been proposed to help districts and cities improve old schools or build new ones to accommodate the growing student population.

High Hopes for College. This proposed grant program is designed to increase high school achievement and college enrollment among students in low-income communities through college-school-community partnerships. These partnerships would apply for funds to establish programs that will show students what it takes to go to college, provide information about financial aid, and work with students to make sure they take preparatory courses — such as the challenging math and science classes — recommended for college.

Think College Early. This public information campaign addresses the call for early college awareness information and activities for middle and junior high school students, with particular emphasis on students from high-poverty communities. With changes in the 1997 federal budget to help make college more accessible, attending college is now an option for all students, but many students and their parents do not begin to think about college until late in high school, if they think about it at all.

America Reads Challenge. In order to help all children learn to read well and independently by the end of third grade, this initiative focuses on strategies for creating extended learning opportunities, high-quality classroom instruction, strengthening parental involvement and investment in early childhood education, promoting greater public awareness about literacy, and supporting research and evaluation. Already, thousands of federal work-study and community volunteer tutors are helping children develop their reading skills. For further information, see the website at <www.ed.gov/inits/americareads>.

Programs to Improve Low-Performing Schools

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. This new program helps schools identify and adopt high-quality, well-defined, and research-based comprehensive school reform models that show the most promise of preparing children to meet challenging state content and performance standards. In July 1998, $145 million will be distributed as formula grants to state education agencies, which will then use the funds to make competitive grants to local education agencies. In FY 1998, $120 million will be administered for this program under Title I and $25 million under the Fund for the Improvement of Education. For further information, contact Bill Kincaid at (202) 205-4292.

Title I. The largest federal education program for pre-K through 12 education, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has one overriding goal: to improve teaching and learning for low-achieving children in high-poverty schools so they can meet challenging academic standards. Funds are provided to districts and schools based on their numbers of poor children. Schools with poverty rates of 50 percent or more may combine their Title I funds with state and local resources and most other federal education funds to upgrade their entire education program rather than targeting services only to identified children. Schools with poverty rates below 50 percent, or those that choose not to adopt a schoolwide program, may give services to those children identified as failing, or most at risk of failing. For further information, contact Mary Jean Le Tendre at (202) 260-0826 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CEP/>.

The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 is based on the premise that higher expectations produce better performance, that academic standards should be raised, and that schools and teachers should be specific about what they expect children to learn. Goals 2000 challenges states and communities to develop and implement academic content standards, student performance standards and assessments, and plans for improving teacher training. Districts may apply for one of three types of grants: local reform, professional development, or pre-service training. Goals 2000 also provides the authority to waive statutory and regulatory requirements of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act and of the following programs under the ESEA: Title I; Title II, Eisenhower Professional Development; Title IV, Safe and Drug Free Schools; Title VI, Innovative Education Strategies; and Title VII, Part C, Emergency Immigrant Education. Twelve states are currently part of the Education Flexibility Partnership Demonstration Program (CO, IL, IA, KS, MD, MA, MI, NM, OH, OR, TX, VT). Schools and districts in these states can apply directly to their state education agency for waivers from federal rules and regulations. For further information, contact Tom Fagan at (202) 401-0039 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/G2K>.

The Public Charter Schools Program. The Charter Schools Program provides financial assistance for designing and initially implementing charter schools created by teachers, parents, and other community members. Grants are available on a competitive basis to state education agencies (SEAs) in states that allow charter schools; the SEAs make subgrants to authorized public chartering agencies in partnership with developers of charter schools. If an eligible SEA chooses not to participate or if its application for funding is not approved, the Department can make grants directly to eligible local partnerships. Charter schools are free from most education laws and regulations, but are accountable for results. In return for increased accountability, they gain autonomy in such areas as personnel, curriculum, budgets, scheduling, and other matters through a legal contract with a school board or other public chartering agency authorized by state law. Standards for performance are established in the contract. For further information, contact John Fiegel at (202) 260-2671 or see the website at <www.uscharterschools.org>.

Other Programs That Can Help Support Reform Efforts

21st Century Community Learning Centers. This program is authorized under Title X, Part I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The funds must be used to expand a school's capacity to address the educational needs of its community. The program's current focus is on expanding learning opportunities for children in a safe, drug-free, and supervised environment. Middle school students are a priority for this program in 1998. Schools in Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities will also be targeted. This program will bring much-needed attention to supplementary learning activities that address adolescence and the problems of drug use, gang involvement, and violence. The program will give $40 million in grants to local school-community consortia in 1998. For further information, contact Bob Stonehill (202) 219-2088 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC>.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. This program provides funds to help states, schools, and communities design, implement, and evaluate alcohol and drug education and prevention programs. SEAs are required to distribute 91 percent of funds to local education agencies for drug and violence prevention. Activities authorized under the statute include: (1) the development of instructional materials; (2) counseling services; (3) after-school programs; (4) professional development programs for school personnel, students, law enforcement officials, judicial officials, or community leaders; (5) conflict resolution, peer mediation, and mentoring programs; (6) character education programs and community service projects; (7) the establishment of safe zones of passage for students to and from school; and (8) the acquisition and installation of metal detectors and the hiring of security personnel. The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act gives states flexibility in targeting resources to where they are most needed. The law increases accountability by requiring states to measure the success of their programs against clearly defined goals and objectives. For further information, contact Bill Modzeleski (202) 260-3954 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS>.

Technology Literacy Challenge Fund. The Technology Literacy Challenge Fund provides funds to states, on a formula basis, to help local districts use technology to strengthen their educational programs. The goals of the Challenge Fund are to: (1) provide all teachers with the training and support they need to help students learn by using technology; (2) provide all schools with modern computers; (3) connect all classrooms to the information superhighway; and (4) make effective software and on-line learning resources an integral part of the curriculum in schools. Ninety-five percent of the funds that a state receives must be awarded to school systems on a competitive basis. For further information, contact Tom Fagan at (202) 401-0039 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/Technology/inititiv.html>.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The mission of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education is to promote children's learning through the development and use of family-school-community-business partnerships that strengthen schools and improve student achievement. A growing grassroots movement of over 4,000 schools, employers, and community and religious groups has emerged to support local and national efforts including: (1) adopting family-friendly business practices; (2) providing before- and after-school activities for children; (3) giving parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn; and (4) promoting family and community involvement in children's learning. For further information, see the website at <http://www.ed.gov/PFIE/>.

Regional Resource and Federal Center Program. These centers promote communication among states and school districts about implementing systemic reform. They provide key technical assistance to SEAs, school districts and their partners, as well as link SEAs and school districts with technical assistance providers. Part of their mission is to partner with other Department-funded programs to address school-based reform.

The Federal Resource Centers for Education
Carol Validivieso, Director
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 884-8215
Fax: (202)884-8443
E-mail: frc@aed.org
Website: http://www.dssc.org/frc/

Northeast Regional Resource Center
Ed Wilkins
Trinity College of Vermont
Colchester Avenue
Burlington, VT 05401
Phone: (802) 658-503
Fax: (802)658-7435
E-mail: nerrc@aol.com
Web://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/nerrc/index.htm

Mid-South Regional Resource
Ken Olson, Director
Human Development Institute
University of Kentucky
126 Mineral Industries Building
Lexington, KY 40506-0051
Phone: (606) 257-4921
Fax: (606) 257-4353
E-mail: MSRRC@ihdi.ihdi.uky.edu
Web: http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/projects/Msrrc/

South Atlantic Regional Resource Center
Denise Steward, Acting Director
Florida Atlantic University
1236 North University Drive
Plantation, FL 33322
Phone: (954) 473-6106
Fax: (954) 424-4309
E-mail: SARRC@acc.fau.edu
Website: http://fau.edu/divept/sarrc/

Great Lakes Area Regional Resource Center
Larry Magliocca, Director
The Ohio State University
700 Ackerman Road Sts. 440
Columbus, Ohio 43202
Phone: (614) 447-0844
Fax: (614) 447-9043
E-mail: marshall.76@osu.edu
Website: http://www.csnp.ohio-state.edu/glarrc.htm

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center
John Copenhaver, Director
Utah State University
1780 North Research Parkway Ste. 112
Logan, UT 84341
Phone: (801) 752-0238
Fax: (801) 753-9750
E-mail: cope@cc.usu.edu
Website: http://www.usu.edu/~mprrc

Western Regional Resource Center
Richard Zeller, Director
1268 University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403-1268
Phone: (541) 346-5641
Fax: (541) 346-5639
E-mail: richard_zeller@ccmail.uoregon.edu
Website: http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/wrrc.html

Technical Assistance Providers

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers. These 15 centers assist states, local education agencies (LEAs), Native American tribes, schools, and other recipients of funds under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Priority for services is given to high-poverty schools and districts, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and IASA recipients implementing schoolwide programs. The centers help recipients of IASA funds implement school reform programs; adopt, adapt, and implement proven practices for improving teaching and learning; coordinate school reform programs with other federal, state, and local education plans and activities; and administer IASA programs. Many of the centers have made services to low-performing schools a priority. They provide assistance by: (1) identifying and disseminating successful practices and appropriate research-based programs to schools, districts, SEAs and other educational entities; (2) creating mentoring relationships between low-performing and high-achieving schools; and (3) providing high-quality professional development for state, school district, and school personnel to increase their capacities for supporting programs authorized by IASA.

Centers also consult with state, district, and school representatives and other parties. For example, one center provides assistance to a network of deputy commissioners of education. Through its partner, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the center is helping this group create a state-level accountability system that will identify both low- and high-performing schools and districts through an indicator system tied to state content and performance standards. The centers also provide on-site technical assistance and follow-up on conducting and interpreting self-assessments; using consolidated planning to coordinate state and federal resources effectively; and improving the quality of instruction, curricula, assessments, and other aspects of school reform. For further information on the centers in general, contact Edith Harvey at (202) 260-1393 or see the website at <www.ed.gov/oese/>. Contact information for individual centers is listed below.

Region I

Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

New England Comprehensive Assistance Center
Wendy Allen, Director
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel St.
Newton, MA 02158-1069
Phone: (617) 969-7110 ext. 2201
Fax: (617) 965-6325
E-mail: wallen@edc.org
Website: http://www.edc.org/NECAC/

Region II

New York State

New York Technical Assistance Center (NYTAC)
LaMar P. Miller, Executive Director
New York University
82 Washington Square East, Suite 72
New York, NY 10003
Phone: (800) 469-8224
Fax: (212) 995-4199
E-mail: millrla@is2.nyu.edu
Website: http://www.nyu.edu/education/metrocenter

Region III

Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC

Region III Comprehensive Center
Charlene Rivera, Director
Institute for Equity & Excellence in Education
George Washington University
1730 N Lynn St., Suite 401
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 528-3588
Fax: (703) 528-5973
E-mail: crivera@ceee.gwu.edu/
Website: www.gwu.edu/nieee

Region IV

Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Region IV Comprehensive Technical Assistance Center
Terry Eidell, Executive Director
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc.
Math and Science Consortium
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-13248
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org
Website: http://www.ael.org

Region V

Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi

Region 5 SE Comprehensive Assistance Center
Hai T. Tran, Director
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
3330 N Causeway Boulevard, Suite 430
Metairie, LA 70002-3573
Phone: (504) 838-6861 or (800) 644-8671
Fax: (504) 831-5242
E-mail: htran@sedl.org
Website: http://www.sedl.org/secac/

Region VI

Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin

Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center Consortium - Region VI
Walter Secada, Director
University of Wisconsin
1025 W Johnson St.
Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 263-4220
Fax: (608) 263-3733
E-mail: wgsecada@facstaff.wisc.edu
Website: http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/ccvi/

Region VII

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma

Region VII Comprehensive Center
John Steffens, Executive Director
Belinda Biscoe, Director
University of Oklahoma
555 E Constitution St., Suite 111
Norman, OK 73072-7820
Phone: (405) 325-1729 or (800) 228-1766
Fax: (405) 325-1824
E-mail: regionvii@ou.edu
Website: http://www.occe.ou.edu/comp/comp.html

Region VIII

Texas

Star Center
Maria Robledo Montecel, Executive Director
Albert Cortez, Site Director
Intercultural Development Research Association
Institute for Policy & Leadership
5835 Callaghan Rd., Suite 350
San Antonio, TX 78228-1190
Phone: (210) 684-8180 or (888) 394-7827
Fax: (210) 684-5389
E-mail: idra@idra.org
Website: http://www.idra.org

Region IX

Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah

Southwest Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center
Paul E. Martinez, Director
New Mexico Highlands University
500 Laser Rd., NE, Suite B
Rio Rancho, NM 87124
Phone: (505) 891-6111 or (800) 247-4269
Fax: (505) 891-5744
E-mail: info@cesdp.nmhu.edu
Website: http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu

Region X

Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming

Northwest Regional Assistance Center
Carlos Sundermann, Director
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 Southwest Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9480
Fax: (503) 275-9625
E-mail: mwrac@nwrel.org
Website: http://www.nwrac.org

Region XI

Northern California

Comprehensive Assistance Center
WestEd
Beverly Farr, Director
730 Harrison St.
San Francisco, CA 94107-1242
Phone: (415) 565-3009 or (800) 64-LEARN
Fax: (415) 565-3012
E-mail: bfarr@wested.org
Website: http://www.wested.org/cc

Region XII

Southern California

Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center
Henry Mothner, Director
Los Angeles County Office of Education
9300 Imperial Highway
Downey, CA 90242-2890
Phone: (562) 922-6364
Fax: (562) 922-6699
E-mail: mothner_henry@lacoe.edu
Website: http://sccas.lacoe.edu

Region XIII

Alaska

Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center
Bill Buell, Director
South East Regional Resource Center
210 Ferry Way, Suite 200
Juneau, AK 99801
Phone: (907) 586-6806
Fax: (907) 463-3811
E-mail: joannh@akrac.k12.ak.us
Website: www.akrac.k12.ak.us

Region XIV
Florida Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands
Comprehensive Assistance Center
Trudy Hensley; Director
Educational Testing Service
1979 Lake Side Parkway, Suite 400
Tucker, GA 30084
Phone: (770) 723-7434 or (800) 241-3865
Fax: (770) 723-7436
E-mail: thensley@ets.org
Website: http://www.cal.org/cal/html/cc14.htm

Region XV
American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau
Pacific Center
Pacific Resources for Education Learning
John W. Kofel, Executive Director
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu
Website: http://prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu

The Regional Educational Laboratories. The Regional Educational Laboratory program, the Department's largest research and development investment, provides a wealth of assistance that can help low-performing schools improve. The 10 regional laboratories help anyone involved in education improvement gain access to the best available research and knowledge from practice. The laboratories are especially strong in helping schools identify needs, suggesting appropriate remedies, and adapting reform programs to schools' own needs. Laboratories can also help schools improve curriculum, assessment, and evaluation practices.

Western Region
Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah
WestEd
Glen Harvey, Director
Tom Ross, Inquiries
730 Harrison St.
San Francisco, CA 94107
Phone: (415) 565-3000
Fax: (415) 565-3012
E-mail: tross@wested.org
Website: http://www.wested.org
Specialty area: Assessment and Accountability

Central Region
Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming
Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory
J. Timothy Waters, Executive Director
2550 S Parker Rd., Suite 500
Aurora, CO 80014
Phone: (303) 337-0990
Fax: (303) 337-3005
E-mail: twaters@mcrel.org
Website: www.mcrel.org
Specialty Area: Curriculum, Learning and Instruction

Midwestern Region
Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)
Jeri Nowakowski, Executive Director
1900 Spring Rd., Suite 300
Oak Brook, IL 60521
Phone: (630) 571-4700
Fax: (630) 571-4716
E-mail: info@ncrel.org
Website: http://www.ncrel.org

Northwestern Region
Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Ethel Simon-McWilliams, Executive Director
101 SW Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
Phone: (503) 275-9500 or (800) 547-6339
Fax: (503) 275-9489
E-mail: info@mwrel.org
Website: http://www.nwrel.org
Specialty Area: School Change Processes

Pacific Region
American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau
Pacific Resources for Education and Learning
John W. Kofel, Executive Director
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: (808) 533-6000
Fax: (808) 533-7599
E-mail: kofelj@prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu
Website: http://prel-oahu-1.prel.hawaii.edu
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Northeastern Region
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virgin Islands
Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)
Phil Zarlengo, Executive Director
222 Richmond St., Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 274-9548 or (800) 521-9550
Fax: (401) 421-7650
E-mail: Phil_Zarlengo@Brown.edu
Website: http://www.lab.brown.edu
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Mid-Atlantic Region
Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC
Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)
Margaret Wang, Executive Director
933 Ritter Annex
1301 Cecil B. Moore Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19122
Phone: (215) 204-3001
Fax: (215) 204-5130
E-mail: lss@vm.temple.org
Website: http://www.temple.org/LSS
Specialty Area: Urban Education

Southeastern Region
Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Don Holznagel, Acting Executive Director
P.O. Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Phone: (910) 334-3211 or (800) 755-3277
Fax: (910) 334-3268
E-mail: rforbes@serve.org
Website: http://www.serve.org
Specialty Area: Early Childhood Education

Southwestern Region
Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
Wesley Hoover, Executive Director
211 E Seventh St.
Austin, TX 78701
Phone: (512) 476-6861
Fax: (512) 476-2286
E-mail: whoover@sedl.org
Website: http://www.sedl.org
Specialty Area: Language and Cultural Diversity

Appalachia Region
Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia
Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL)
Terry Eidell, Director
1031 Quarrier St.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325
Phone: (304) 347-0400 or (800) 624-9120
Fax: (304) 347-0487
E-mail: eidellt@ael.org
Website: http://www.ael.org
Specialty Area: Rural Education

Research & Development Centers. The Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) supports 12 Research & Development Centers. These centers, which are located at major universities around the country, conduct research and development on special topics such as reading, the education of at-risk children, early childhood development, postsecondary education, and education policy. These centers can be accessed through the World Wide Web at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ResCtr.html>.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). ERIC offers many resources to parents, students, teachers, and administrators who are interested in improving achievement at their schools. ERIC is a national information system that provides ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. It is the world's largest source of education information. The ERIC database contains nearly one million abstracts of documents and journal articles on education research and practice. All of the ERIC Clearinghouses have toll-free phone numbers and websites. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology hosts "ASK ERIC," a question-answering service that responds within 48 hours to any question about education. You can ask questions directly from the AskEric website at <www.askeric.org> or e-mail <askeric@askeric.org>.

The Fund for the Improvement of Education. This fund supports nationally significant programs focused on improving the quality of education, helping all students meet challenging state content standards, and contributing to the achievement of the National Education Goals. Grants and contracts may be awarded to state and local education agencies, institutions of higher education, and other public and private organizations and institutions. Recently, projects have been funded that might offer assistance to low-performing schools, including the development of state curriculum frameworks and content standards and standards-based professional development projects. For more information contact Lois Weinberg at (202) 219-2147; e-mail: Lois_Weinberg@ed.gov; fax: (202) 219-2053.

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC). ENC serves as a central dissemination point for information about curriculum materials and education reform. ENC promotes excellence in K-12 math and science education through a comprehensive collection of curriculum materials and nationwide dissemination of information and materials for all educators. ENC may be contacted at The Ohio State University, 1929 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1079; or by calling (614) 292-8389, or toll-free (800) 621-5785; or visiting the website at <http://www.enc.org>.

The Eisenhower Regional Consortia for Mathematics and Science Education. The Consortia work in conjunction with the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse to support professional development of K-12 teachers, including those located in low-performing schools. The Consortia of 10 grantees provide technical assistance and disseminate information to help states and individual educators implement math and science programs in accordance with new standards. Specific areas of assistance include teacher professional development, student assessment, and uses of technology. For further information, contact Carolyn Warren at (202) 219-2206.

Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program promotes school improvement efforts by identifying and recognizing outstanding public and private schools, making research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so that they can assess themselves and plan improvements, and encouraging schools to share information about best practices. The program helps schools turn around through a self-assessment process in which all relevant school stakeholders participate. The program specifically celebrates those schools that have shown significant improvement over five years. For further information, see the website at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/BlueRibbonSchools/about.html>.

Helpful Documents

The following documents are available by calling the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN. Additional publications are listed on the Department's website at <www.ed.gov>.

General Information:

- *A Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century*
- *Answer the Call to Action: Put High Expectations and Standards of Excellence Into Action in Your Schools. Questions, Ideas, and Information to Get You Started*
- *School Based Reform Guide*
- *Implementing School Wide Programs*
- *Improving Schools from the Bottom Up*

Reading Well and Independently By the End of Third Grade:

- *America Reads Challenge* information
- *Just Add Kids: A Resource Directory of Learning Partners, Reading Sites, and Other Literacy Organizations That Serve Children and Their Families*
- *Ready Set Read* (in English or in Spanish)
- *SIMPLE THINGS*
- *Checkpoints for Progress*

Preparing Students Academically and Financially for College:

- *Preparing Your Child for College*

- *Getting Ready for College Early: A Handbook for Parents of Students in the Middle and Junior High School Years*
- *Think College? Me? Now?*

Mastering the Basic and Core Subjects to Meet High Standards:

- *Moving America to the Head of the Class*
- *Achieving the Goals, Goal 5: First in the World in Math and Science*

Teacher Quality:

- *Teachers and Goals 2000: Leading the Journey Toward High Standards for All Students*
- *A New Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education*
- *New Skills for New Teachers: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement*

Technology:

- *Parents' Guide to the Internet*

Family and Community Involvement in Education:

- *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Education*
- *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers*
- *America Goes Back to School*
- *Employers, Families and Education*
- *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools*
- Information on *The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education*
- *A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family-School-Community Partnerships*
- *Seven Good Practices for Families* (poster)

- *Summer Home Learning Recipes for Parents*
- *Welcome to School: Questions Parents Might Ask*
- *Ideabook: Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches*

The following documents are available by calling OERI's National Library of Education at **1-800-424-1616**:

- *Read With Me: A Guide for Student Volunteers Starting Early Childhood Programs*
- *Tried and True: Tested Ideas for Teaching and Learning from the Regional Educational Laboratories*
- *Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning the Arts*
- *Transforming Ideas for Teaching and Learning Reading*
- *Confronting the Odds: Students at Risk and the Pipeline to Higher Education*
- *Teachers' Sense of Community: How Do Public and Private Schools Compare*
- *Early Childhood Research and Policy Briefs: Quality in Child Care Centers, Vol. 1., No. 1*
- *Early Childhood Digest: Families and Teachers as Partners*
- *Reaching All Families*
- *Parent Involvement in Children's Education: Efforts by Public Elementary Schools*

The following documents are available by calling the Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools Clearinghouse at **1-800-624-0100**:

- *Creating Safe Schools: A Resource Collection for Planning and Action*
- *Manual on School Uniforms*
- *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*
- *READY SET GO*, an early childhood publication of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program
- *Success Stories '94: A Guide to Safe, Disciplined, & Drug-Free Schools*

Endnotes

1. *Education Week*, 1998.

2. Educational Testing Service, 1998

3. Fine, 1991; Anyon, 1995; Meier, 1991.

4. Elam, 1997.

5. Chicago Public Schools, 1997.

6. Charles A. Dana Center, 1997.

7. *U.S. News and World Report*, 1997

8. Hawley, 1997.

9. American Federation of Teachers, 1997; Meisels, 1993.

10. National Education Goals Panel, 1997.

11. Council of Great City Schools, 1997.

12. Lee, 1996.

13. Lee, 1996.

14. Odden, 1997.

15. Dauber and Epstein, 1991.

16. Ritter, 1997.

17. Odden, 1997.

18. ERIC Clearinghouse, 1997.

19. Kemple, 1997.

20. American Federation of Teachers, 1997.

21. Olson, 1998.

22. American Federation of Teachers, 1997. Not all states that have the authority to reconstitute districts or schools have exercised that power. Connecticut's reconstitution authority only applies to the Hartford school district.

Bibliography

American Federation of Teachers. *Passing on Failure: District Promotion Policies and Practices* (Washington D.C.: Author, 1997).

American Federation of Teachers. *Raising Student Achievement: A Resource Guide for Redesigning Low-Performing Schools* (Washington D.C.: Author, 1997).

Annenberg Foundation. "Boston Public Schools Plan for Whole-School Change." *Challenge Journal* (Fall 1997).

Anyon, Jean. "Race, Social Class and Education Reform in an Inner City School." *Teachers College Record* 97:1 (Fall 1995).

Charles A. Dana Center. *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1997).

Chicago Public Schools. *Expecting More: Higher Standards for Chicago's Students* (Chicago: Board of Education of the City of Chicago, 1997).

Chicago Public Schools. *CPS Ninth Grade Students Excel in Summer School* (August 25, 1997).

Comer, James P. et al. *Rallying the Whole Village* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

Consortium for Policy Research in Education. *Public Policy and School Reform: A Research Summary*. Report #36 (Philadelphia: Author, 1996).

Council of Chief State School Officers. *Standards for School Leaders*.

Darling-Hammond, Linda. *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

Darling-Hammond, Linda, and Carol Asher. *Creating Accountability in Big-City Schools* (Washington D.C.: OERI).

Education Commission of the States. *A Policymakers' Guide to Education Reform Networks* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1997).

Education Week. "The Urban Challenge: Public Education in The 50 States." *Education Week* XVII:17 (January 8, 1998).

Educational Testing Service. Unpublished tabulations of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results prepared for the Planning and Evaluation Service, U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

Elam, Stanley. *The 29th Annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools* (Washington D.C.: Phi Delta Kappan, 1997).

Elmore, Richard F. *School Variation and Systemic Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Epstein, Joyce, and Susan Dauber. "School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parental Involvement in Inner City Elementary and Middle Schools." *Elementary School Journal* 91:3 (1991) 289-305.

ERIC. "Recent Experience with Urban School Choice Plans," *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education* 127 (October 1997).

ERIC. "Turning It Around for All Youth: From Risk to Resilience," *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education* 126 (August 1997).

Fashola, Olatokunbo S., and Robert E. Slavin. "Schoolwide Reform Models: What Works?" *Phi Delta Kappan* (January, 1998) 370-379.

Fine, Michelle. *Framing Dropouts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

Haslam, M. Bruce. "How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure." *Getting Better By Design* Vol. 4 (Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1994).

Hawley, Willis, et al. "An Outlier Study of School Effectiveness: Implications for Public Policy and School Improvement." Symposium presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL (March 1997).

Herman, Rebecca, and Sam Stringfield. *Ten Promising Programs for Educating All Children: Evidence of Impact* (Arlington, VA: Educational Research Services, 1997).

Johnson, Susan Moore. *Teachers at Work: Achieving Success in Our Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

Jones, Richard. "Streamlining Saves Philadelphia Schools $29 million." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (January 29, 1998).

Kemple, James J. *Career Academies* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1997).

Lee, Valerie E., and Julia B. Smith. "High School Size: Which Works Best, and for Whom?" Draft paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY (April 1996).

Lenz, Linda. "School Reform: What Matters Most." *Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform* (November, 1997).

Levine, Daniel U. "Creating Effective Schools: Findings and Implications From Research and Practice." *Phi Delta Kappan* (January 1991) 389-393.

Lippman, Laura. *The Challenge of Location and Poverty* (Washington D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

McLaughlin, Milbrey, and Joan Talbert. *Contexts That Matter for Teaching and Learning: Strategic Opportunities for Meeting the Nation's Education Goals* (Stanford, CA: Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching, 1993).

Meier, Deborah. *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America From a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

Meisels, Samuel J. "Failure in Grade: Do Retained Students Catch Up?" *Journal of Educational Research* 87:2 (November/December 1993) 69-77.

Miles, Karen Hawley, and Linda Darling-Hammond. "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools" (January 1997).

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching* (New York: Author, 1997).

National Education Goals Panel. *Special Early Childhood Report 1997* (Washington D.C.: Author, 1997).

New York State Education Department. *The Registration Review Process* (Albany, NY: Author, 1997).

New York State Education Department. *Steps to Success: Resource Commitment for School-by-School Reform in New York* (Albany, NY: Author, 1997).

Newmann, Fred M., and Gary G. Wehlage. *Successful School Restructuring* (Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995).

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. *Catalog of School Reform Models: First Edition* (March 1998).

O'Day, Jennifer, Margaret E. Goertz, and Robert E. Flodden. "Building Capacity for Education Reform." *CPRE Policy Briefs* (Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1995).

Odden, Allan. "How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation." *Getting Better By Design* Vol. 3 (Arlington, VA: New American Schools, 1997)

Olson, Lynn. "Distinguished Educators Train Their Focus on Instruction." *Education Week* (April 1, 1998).

Riedinger, Susan Allin. *Even Start: Facilitating Transitions to Kindergarten* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Ritter, John. "Setting a Standard for School Standards." *USA Today* (April 19, 1997) 3.

Rockefeller Foundation. "Super Superintendents: Mobilizing School Systems and Communities for Children's Sake." *School Development Program Newsline* 4:3 (Winter, 1996).

Sashkin, Marshall and John Egermeier. *School Change Models and Processes: A Review and Synthesis of Research and Practice* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Taylor, Barbara O. "Case Studies in Effective Schools Research" (Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development, 1990).

U.S. Department of Education. *Tools for Schools: School Reform Models Supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students* (Washington D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1998).

Wang, Margaret C., and Maynard Reynolds. *Development and Learning of Children and Youth in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, 1997).

Wohlstetter, Priscilla, and Mohrman, Susan Albers. *Studies of Education Reform: Assessment of School-Based Management* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Acknowledgments

Many people helped create this guide by providing information, research, or feedback. The Department would like to thank all the teachers, principals, and school district administrators in Baltimore, Chicago, and San Francisco who helped organize and participated in focus groups to discuss how they are turning around their schools. Appreciation also goes to the principals and teachers who opened their schools to us in Chicago.

We also are grateful for the help provided by: "Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform"; Chicago's Successful Schools; Susan Fuhrman, Consortium for Policy Research in Education; Cathy Gassenheimer, A+ Research Foundation; Philip Hansen, Chief Accountability Officer, Chicago Public Schools; Pat Harvey, Director of Urban Education and Senior Fellow, National Center on Education and the Economy; Anne Jolly, Executive Director, Alabama State Teacher Forum; the Kellogg Foundation; Phyllis McClure, private consultant; Jacques Nacson, National Education Association; the National Alliance for Business; Claire Porter, National Association of Secondary School Principals; Marie Robinson, National Association of Elementary School Principals; the Rockefeller Foundation; Dr. Jack Shelton, PACERS Small School Cooperative; and Steve Fleischman, Ruth Wattenberg, and Burnie Bonds, American Federation of Teachers. The Department also acknowledges the work of Jennifer O'Day at the University of Wisconsin on the section of the guide on lessons learned about reconstitution. The regional educational laboratories and comprehensive regional assistance centers provided valuable examples of turnaround schools; Barbara Vespucci and Kristin Bunce helped assemble these examples.

Particular thanks go to the numerous people inside and outside the Department who reviewed and commented on this guide, including Richard Mills, Commissioner of Education for New York State, and Thomas Payzant, Superintendent of Boston Public Schools. Many others provided examples, advice, and insight as we drafted this guide, and we apologize for not being able to acknowledge individually all their hard work.

This guide was prepared by Planning and Evaluation Service staff members Kathryn Doherty and Sarah Abernathy, with the assistance of Jennifer Ballen, under the direction of Val Plisko and Adriana de Kanter. Terry Peterson, Counselor to the Secretary, provided invaluable guidance throughout its preparation.